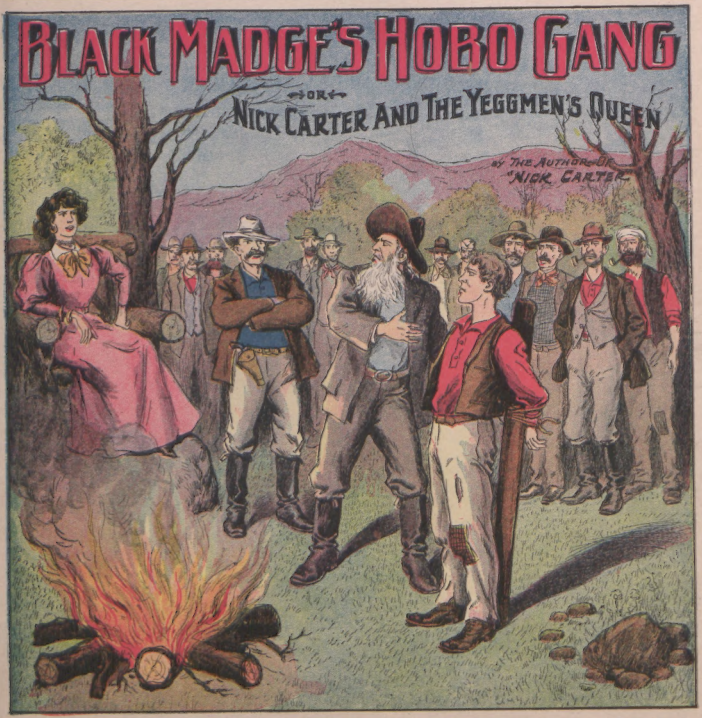
NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

No. 542 NEW YORK, MAY 18, 1907. **Price, Five Cents**



It was a strange scene upon which the light of a huge camp-fire shone that night in the outlaws' retreat. With Nick in disguise, as his counsel, Patsy stood trial for his life.

NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Avenue, N. Y. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1907, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.*

No. 542. NEW YORK, May 18, 1907. Price Five Cents.

BLACK MADGE'S HOBO GANG;

OR,

NICK CARTER AND THE YEGGMEN'S QUEEN.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE ESCAPE OF THE HOBO QUEEN.

"Well, Carter, it didn't take long for Black Madge to give us the slip, did it?"

The president of the E. & S. W. R. R. Co. rose and shook hands with the detective as he spoke, after which, before resuming his chair, he offered Nick a cigar and also lighted one for himself.

"As a matter of fact," he went on, after the cigar was well lighted, "I don't think the woman was in custody twenty-four hours. Hold on; let me see. Yes; after all, it was about thirty-six hours. Now, what do you think of that, Carter?"

"I think," replied the detective, smiling, "that, considering the trouble we were put to in capturing her, it was a very short time for us to hold her. I only received your note half an hour ago, in which you asked me to come to see you as soon as possible. Now, what can I do for you, Mr. Cobalt?"

"Do? Why, you can catch Black Madge again for us."

"Oh," said the detective, smiling. "Can I? Well, possibly."

"You see," the president continued, "we have called a hasty meeting of the board since the information of the escape of Black Madge came to us, and we have decided that no effort shall be spared to get that woman into custody again. At liberty, she is a constant menace to the welfare of the road, and of every town along the line, as well as of everybody who lives in those towns."

"I'll admit that she's a bad one," said Nick.

"We don't want her at liberty. With the following she has, she is a dangerous woman—much more dangerous than a man would be, in her position."

"I don't know about that. But she is dangerous enough without argument about it."

"Exactly. We want her caught. And we want you to catch her."

"I imagine that this time, Mr. Cobalt, it will be rather a harder task than it was before."

"Why so?"

"She will be very much more on her guard now than then. And, besides, she knows enough about me to know that now I will most certainly hunt her down."

The railway president was thoughtful a moment, and then he said:

"You see, Carter, the very manner of her escape is a menace to us."

"How is that?" asked the detective. "The first and, therefore, the only information I have had on the subject was that contained in your letter, which told me merely that she had escaped from the jail in Calomont. What is there that is particularly interesting about the manner of her escape?"

"Then you have not heard about it, eh?"

"I have just informed you that I have heard nothing."

"Well, to say the least, her escape was characteristic. Her hoboes did it for her."

Nick raised his brows.

"You don't say so!" he exclaimed. "Well, we might have expected something like that, I suppose. I regarded it as a little bit unfortunate that the arrest was made in the county where it was, for that compelled us to put her temporarily in the Calomont Jail—and I thought at the time that the Calomont Jail was a trifle close to her stamping-ground. Now, suppose you tell me exactly what happened."

"You know Calomont, of course?" asked the railway president, and the detective smiled broadly.

"I know very little about it," he said, "with the exception that I assisted in the robbing of a bank that is located there."*

It was the president's turn to smile.

"That was a queer experience for you, Carter, wasn't it? But the president of that bank is quite willing that you should rob it again on the same terms. You know we fixed him all up again, and now they have a new vault—something that they have been wanting for several years; and, more than that, my company promises to keep a large deposit there now, which they like even better. All together, they regard your descent upon the bank as a very fortunate experience for them."

"No doubt. Now about that escape."

"Calomont is a village of about three thousand inhabitants. That bank, for instance, is the only one there."

"What has that——"

"Wait a moment. Calomont has suffered a great deal from the depredations of the hoboes. It is not very long ago that tramps—yeggmen, you call them—literally infested the place, and the result was that the selectmen passed very stringent laws about them."

"But what has that to do with the escape?"

"I am coming to that."

"Well?"

"Calomont has a force of special constables, whose duties consist in arresting and taking to jail every tramp who crosses the borders of the village. The other night, when Madge made her escape, the jail was filled with them."

"Oh," said the detective. "I begin to understand."

"Exactly."

"It was a put-up job on their part to get as many of their kind as possible in the jail for that night, and then to take their queen out of it; eh?"

"Precisely; and that is just what they did do. You see, the tramps began coming in early in the day. They made intervals between the times of their arrivals, and they appeared at different parts of the town, so that before anybody realized it, the jail was about filled with them. But they seemed not to know one another, and so the residents of the town went peacefully to sleep that night, as usual."

"Well?"

"Well, in the morning when they woke up, the jail had been gutted—literally gutted."

"In what sense do you mean?"

"In every sense."

"Tell me what you mean, please."

"I mean that all the tramps who had been locked up there overnight had disappeared; that they had managed to break into the main part of the jail, and that when they went away they took Black Madge with them; and that before they went away they passed through the jail with axes and smashed everything in sight. They tore down partitions; they smashed doors, and where the doors could not be smashed, they destroyed the locks. They tied up the jailer, and threatened to kill him—I regard it as a wonder that they did not kill him."

"So do I. Go on."

"That is all there is to it. They went there, of course, with the deliberate intention of rescuing Black Madge—and they did it."

"Didn't the constables track them out of town?"

"I don't know. I suppose so. But what good would that do?"

"Really none at all—only it might have given us a little idea as to whether they went back to that place in the swamp, where they used to make their headquarters, or if they sought out a new place"

"Oh! Well, I think I can answer that question for you. They did not attempt to return to the swamp. After the descent upon their headquarters there, when the people of the surrounding towns destroyed everything that was contained in that old place, I suppose they decided that it was too warm for them. Anyhow, it is the opinion of the constables that they did not go that way."

"Then I suppose they must have taken to the woods north of the railway-line; eh?"

"You've guessed it, Carter."

"That is a wild country up through there, Mr. Coalt."

"You bet it is. I used to go through there every fall on a hunting-expedition, when I was younger. The country hasn't changed much since that time. It is as wild as

*See No. 541, Nick Carter Weekly—"Hobo Harry, the Beggar King."

if it were in an uncivilized country, instead of being surrounded by——"

"I understand. Then you *do* know something about that country up through there, eh?"

"Yes; I used to boast that I knew every inch of it; but of course, that wasn't quite so, you know."

"Yet you remember it fairly well?"

"I think so."

"Tell me something about it, for that is, I think, where I have got to search for the woman we are after."

"There isn't much to tell about it, save that it is wild and uneven; that the formation is limestone, and the timber is largely red oak. The mountains—or hills, rather—are not high, but they are precipitous, rocky, impassable, full of ravines, and gulches, and unexpected depressions, and scattered around through that region there are innumerable caves, too."

"That is bad," said the detective. "It will make it so much the harder to dislodge the hoboes."

"So you have got your work cut out for this time, and no mistake."

"Could you suggest a competent guide for that region, Mr. Cobalt?"

"Old Bill Turner—if he would go."

"Who is he?"

"An old hunter, who used to take me out with him, and who afterward served as guide for me. But he is an old man now."

"Where does he live?"

"In Calomont. You will have no difficulty in finding him. Ask the first man you meet in the street to direct you to old Bill Turner, and he will do it."

"That part of it is all right—if he is not too old to go."

"Oh, I think he can be induced to do it. Old Bill likes the looks of a dollar as well as any man you ever knew. You have only to offer him enough, and his rheumatism will disappear like magic."

"Then that part of it is all right, too."

"As for the other—the directors of the road think that you were pretty well paid for the other job—the one when we supposed that Hobo Harry, the Beggar King, was a man; so——"

"So they do not feel like offering quite so great a reward this time, eh?"

"No-o-o. But they are willing to pay any price that you think is right. They do not restrict you as to expenses, or as to price. They are willing to leave it entirely to your own sense of the proper thing to do."

"With that understanding," smiled the detective, "I don't think there is any chance for a quarrel between us. I am to understand that I have the same free hand in the matter that I did before?"

"Of course. Your directions are: *Catch Black Madge and break up her gang.*"

"And that, I suppose, is about all that you have to say to me at present."

"Yes; unless you have some questions to ask."

"Not one, thank you. I will ask them of Black Madge—when I catch her."

"Good! I hope it won't be long before you can ask them."

"I don't think it will be very long; only, she is a little bit the smartest woman I ever tried to handle."

CHAPTER II.

PATSY'S DANGEROUS MISSION.

Nick Carter took his youngest assistant, Patsy, to the office of the railway president with him; but he left him outside in the main office while he entered the private one, for it was not at all necessary that Patsy should be present at the interview.

But Patsy had rendered such signal service in the case that had preceded it that Nick felt it incumbent upon him to give him the first chance in this one.

Now, when they left the office of the railway president, they strolled in silence down the street until they came to a restaurant, and, entering, they found a secluded table in one corner, where they seated themselves and gave the order for luncheon.

When it was brought to them, and the waiter had departed, Nick said to his assistant:

"Well, Patsy, we start about where we began on the other case, with the single exception that we have broken up the stronghold in the swamp. Black Madge has escaped."

"I guessed that," said Patsy.

"Do you remember that country around the vicinity of Calomont, Patsy?"

"I should say so—rather."

"You will remember, then, the region to the north of the tracks—to the north of the spot where I met you the other time."

"Yes."

"Well, it is believed—of course, I have not learned anything about the facts more than Cobalt could tell me—but it is believed that Madge and her gang have taken refuge, and have found another stronghold, among the woods and mountains to the north of the old headquarters in the swamp. There is where we have got to search for her."

Patsy nodded.

"The case," continued the detective, "stands like this: We were brought into this case in the first place by Cobalt's sending for me to find and arrest Hobo Harry, the Beggar King. I found that Hobo Harry was a woman, and had about a hundred regular followers. We arrested her, but we could not get any of her followers,

for the very good reason that there was not time, but we did manage to destroy their stronghold, and render that place in the swamp unfit for a rendezvous after that time. And the very next day the railway people sent a force of men in there, and destroyed everything, and what they could not destroy in that way, with axes and matches, they blew up with dynamite."

"Yes; I know all about that."

"So now they have had to find another place. It is safe to say that now that Madge has escaped, she has no less than fifty men around her, and probably as many more. I should not be surprised if there were fully one hundred in the gang, all told."

"Nor I."

"And her first lieutenant—the fellow who is called Handsome—he is a dangerous man."

"You bet he is."

"Well—there is the case. I shall start for Calomont as soon as I have finished with the meal I am now eating."

"And what do you wish me to do?"

"I want you to do a serious thing, and a dangerous one, Patsy."

"Good! That is what I would like to do."

"When we went among them before, you passed under the name of Pat, and represented yourself as a young Irish crook. I think that Black Madge rather liked you. I think also that she had some suspicion of you."

"There isn't any doubt of that."

"And therefore it will be an extremely dangerous thing to do to return there, and still represent yourself as the same character."

"*Gee!* Is *that* what you want me to do?"

"Yes. Do you suppose it can be done?"

"It can be tried."

"You must not forget that they will look upon you with suspicion."

"Oh, I don't forget that."

"They will connect you with their misfortunes at once. Handsome, particularly, after being so nicely fooled by me, will be even more suspicious of you."

"I think I can get around Handsome, all right. It is Madge I am shy of."

"There will be one thing in your favor, Patsy, if you *do* undertake it."

"If I *do* undertake it? Of course, I shall undertake it."

"Then there will be one thing in your favor."

"What is that, please?"

"The very fact that you *do* go back among them in the same character in which you appeared before. I am inclined to think that now they would not take in a new man, no matter how well he might be recommended; but one that they have known before will stand a lot better chance with them."

"I think so."

"The very fact of your returning will go far to allay any suspicions they might have had about you formerly. It would never occur to them that if you were really a detective that time, you would *dare* to return to them in the same character."

"You are right about that."

"And, consequently, if you succeed in passing the investigation of the first few hours, you will be all right."

"I am going to try it, anyhow."

"Good, Patsy! But don't for a moment forget or neglect the danger you will be in every minute you are there."

"I will not."

"You will have to cook up a good story——"

"I have that all ready now."

"Then you can start whenever you please. I shall not interfere with you in the slightest manner."

"But I want a little further instruction, chief."

"The only instruction I have to give you is this: Go there; get among them; become one of them, and one with them; pick up all the information about them that you can, with names and identifications, so that you will be a good witness against them when the time comes."

"I can do that."

"I want you to work independently of me entirely. Your only part of the game, so far as it is directly connected with my part of the work, will be to hold yourself in readiness to lend me a helping hand from the inside at any moment I may happen to want you."

"Of course. That goes without saying. Are Chick and Ten-Ichi going to be in this?"

"Yes. But I have not determined in what way as yet. You will have to be on the lookout for them. I may take one of them with me, and send the other in to follow you. Or I may send both after you, and go it alone myself. Or I may take them both with me. All that will depend upon what information I pick up when I get to Calomont."

"I see."

"Now, Patsy, it is up to you. All that red you used on your hair before has not disappeared yet; but you had better go to a hair-dyer's, and get it fixed up over again. Then make yourself over once more into Pat Slick. I leave the rest to you. But as a last warning, I repeat—*look out for that man Handsome.*"

"Oh, I am not afraid of Handsome. He's a——"

"He is a much smarter man than either of us gave him credit for. He is an educated man, who can represent the hobo so perfectly that you would never suspect that he has a college education. And he is devoted to Madge. Look out for him. He is her right-hand man, and he is dangerous. If he saw through you before, or had any idea that he did see through you, your life won't be worth

a snap of your finger the next time you meet—unless you can manage to shoot first."

"I know that, too. But he did not suspect."

"I am not so sure of that. Madge had a little time to think things over while she was thirty-six hours in the jail, and as soon as she got out, she and Handsome had a chance to talk things over. With their two heads together, they make about as dangerous a pair to play against as could be imagined."

"All right. I'll stand pat—and bluff."

"Be careful that they don't call you, and show down a better hand. That's all."

"Is there any particular game afoot with the hoboes just now?"

"Not that I know of."

"What specific charge are we after Madge for?"

"No specific charge, save that she is accused of all the old ones. There is enough against her to send her to prison for the rest of her life, once she is caught."

"I guess that's no pipe-dream."

"The railway people object to her being at liberty. That is about all."

"And it is up to us to catch her."

"That's the idea."

"What about the rest of the gang?"

"If we can round up the entire outfit, that is what they want us to do. We are to get as many of them as we can, and make the charges after that. That is what you are going inside the ring for; to pick up all the information about the individual members of the gang that you can."

"I see."

"The battle-cry is: Break up the gang! Root it out, so that it cannot grow again."

"It is a pretty big proposition, chief; don't you think so?"

"It is a big proposition, and no mistake. But I shall make my arrangements about that part of it, so that if we ever succeed in getting them rounded up, there will be no difficulty in carrying out the rest of it."

"All right. Now, I suppose I have my instructions."

"Yes."

"And that's all?"

"Yes."

"And you don't expect to see me or to communicate with me again until—when?"

"Until I see you inside the stronghold of the hobo gang—*until I meet you in the midst of Black Madge's Hobo Gang!*"

"That is all right. We'll meet there. I'll get there, and I'll find a way to make them believe in me."

"I hesitate to send you on this business, Patsy. You have never in your life gone out to face quite as much peril as you will find in this expedition of yours now."

"Well, I'll face it; and I'll overcome it, chief."

"You're a good lad, Patsy. God bless you!"

"Don't worry about me, chief; not at all. I will be all right. The hobo hasn't been born yet who can get away with me."

"Don't forget that there are perhaps one hundred of them this time."

"I'm not forgetting it."

"And that the worst and most dangerous of the lot, is the man called Handsome."

"I'll not forget him, either."

Nick rose from the table and stretched out his hand.

"Good-by, my lad," he said. "I don't know when we will meet again. A lot depends upon yourself. Even now I feel almost as if I ought not——"

"Don't say another word, please. I'm going to do what you have laid out for me to do. I wouldn't obey you now if you should change the order."

"Oh, yes, you would. But I won't change it."

And so they parted there in the restaurant.

And a little later Nick Carter took the train for Calomont.

CHAPTER III.

BILL TURNER, THE WOODSMAN.

When Nick Carter arrived at Calomont, he was disguised as a lumberman. It was not exactly the season of the year for lumbermen to enter the woods, unless they were measurers, who were engaged in preparing in advance work for the winter; so that was the character which Nick Carter adopted.

Measurers go into the woods, measure trees on the stump, as it is called, blaze them with cabalistic marks, and otherwise prepare the way for the workers with the axes and saws who are to come later.

It is well known that some of the most expert lumbermen in the world are French Canadians, and so Nick adopted this character, and he knew that as such he could wander at will around the woods and mountains of that region without danger of being suspected for what he really was.

If any of the hoboes who made their headquarters in that region should see him, they would not be inclined to suspect what he really was, and the only actual danger he would stand in would be that they might be inclined to knock him on the head or shoot him from ambush in order to possess themselves of the few articles he had in his possession.

And for that very reason he adopted the disguise of a French Canadian lumberman, for it was rarely that they were supposed to have anything more than what they carried in sight on their backs.

The month was September, and therefore warm. The leaves in some places were getting yellow and red, although there had been no frost; but oak leaves turn earlier than others.

When he descended from the train at Calomont Station, he stood there on the platform until the train had pulled out, and the other passengers who had arrived by it had departed their several ways. Then he approached the baggageman.

"Me want *cherches* ze man named Beel Turner," he said slowly.

"What's that?" asked the baggageman.

"*Cherches*—find; yes; dat ees it. Me want find Beel Turner."

"Oh! Bill Turner, is it? Well, go up that street there until you come to the post-office. You'll like enough see an old, white-whiskered chap standing there, chewing tobacco and spitting. That'll be Bill Turner."

"Beel Turner? He ees known here? No?"

"Known here? Gee! He has lived here since the oldest inhabitant was a baby. He has always lived here. He is about a thousand years old, my man; but as strong and as lively as a kid yet. You'll find him somewhere around the post-office."

Nick thanked him in his broken English and strode up the street.

Sure enough, when he arrived in the vicinity of the post-office, he saw a white-whiskered man standing there, doing the very things the baggage-man had said, and he approached him at once.

"You ees Beel Turner?" he asked modestly, sidling up to the man.

"I be," was the response, while Bill Turner fixed his clear gray eyes upon the detective. "What might you be wantin' of me, stranger?"

"I have—hush!—I have some money for you, Beel Turner. Can you take me where we can talk so that nobody will overhear us?"

Turner eyed him suspiciously for a moment; then he turned abruptly away with the remark:

"Come along with me, stranger."

Nick walked beside him through the town to the very end of the main street. Then they turned into a roadway, which led up a steep hill for some distance, and which presently brought them to a modest cottage that was almost hidden under the brow of the hill.

"Here is where I live," said Turner. "I live here all alone, 'cept a cat and two dogs. But the dogs hev got old like me, now, and they can't go out among the hills as they used to; although, bless you, I reckon I kin walk jest as fur as ever I could, if I try. Come in."

Nick followed him inside, and Turner offered him a rocker near the open window. The whole house was as neat and clean as if it had the care of a woman.

"Now, mister," said Turner, what hev ye got on yer mind?"

"In the first place," replied Nick, in his natural voice, "I am not what I seem to be. I am not a lumberman, or a Frenchman—or a Canadian. I am a detective."

"Sho! You don't say so. Well, that beats me. Sure, ye do it fine, mister. I would never hev suspected at all that you are not what you seem. But go on."

"I have come here after that gang of hoboes who infest the neighborhood for fifty or sixty miles around this place. I am principally after the woman who is their chief. Do you know who I mean?"

"I reckon ye must be referrin' to that there Black Madge and her gang."

"That's right."

"Well, yer up agin' a proposition. That's all I kin say about it."

"I know that; and what I want of you is to get you to help me with that proposition, Bill Turner."

"Ain't I too old?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Is there good pay in it?"

"The very best; and there is fifty dollars down for you right now—if you are inclined to do as I want you to do."

Nick took a roll of bills from his pocket as he spoke, and laid it on the table before the avaricious glances of the old man.

"Well, sir," said Turner slowly, "all I've got to say is this: If I can do what you want done, I'll do it. I want that money as bad as anybody could want it and not grab it right now where it is lying; but I have never had a penny in my life that I didn't get honestly, and I am afraid that I'm too old to do what you want done."

"I tell you that you are not."

"Then in that case, I'll take the money and put it in my pocket—*so*. There! Now, go ahead. If the work is honest, and such as an honest man can do, I'll do it—if I ain't too old, and you say I ain't. But if the work ain't honest, I'll return your money. Now, what is it, mister?"

"I want you first to promise that you will not reveal my identity. I must be Jules Verbeau to you to the end, and you must forget that I am not he in fact."

"You kin consider that done, sir."

"Second, I want you to answer some questions for me."

"Fire away."

"How well do you know the hills and mountains, the ravines and gulches, the rocks and the caves around this region?"

"As well as I know that dooryard in front of you," replied the old man, pointing through the window. "I know every inch of the country—every inch of it."

"Now, another question which you will not understand at once: Do you know how to use a pencil, and is your hand steady enough to draw plans for me?"

"Yes, sir. I began life as a draftsman; but that was when I was a boy."

"That will suffice. Now—could you draw a plan of

different parts of the mountains, so it would be plain enough for me to follow without your being present with me?"

"That would depend upon you, sir. If you are a man who has some woodcraft in your make-up, I say *yes*. It would depend upon you."

"We will consider that question answered, then. Now, have you any idea to what part of the mountainous region around here—say, within fifty miles of where we are seated—the hobo gang would select in which to hide themselves?"

"I think I could guess it to a dot."

"Why?"

"Because there is one region up among those hills which is exactly fitted for them; and from which you couldn't drive them out with a thousand men. That's why!"

"Good. That sounds as if it might be the place they would select. How far is it from here, as you would travel afoot?"

"A matter of thirty miles."

"Now, can you draw me a plan of that region?"

"I kin."

'And how to get there?"

"I kin."

"And are there caverns there? Do you suppose those people are hiding and making their headquarters in caves?"

"Yes, to both questions. The hills round that 'ere region are honeycombed with caves. Some of 'em is big, and some of 'em is little; but there's a lot of 'em there."

"Good; and you know them well enough to give me a working-plan of them? What a sailor would call a chart?"

"You bet I do."

"Now, another subject: Have you ever traveled away from here? Have you ever been to New York, for instance?"

"Never in my life. I've always lived right around here. I don't suppose I have been ten miles away from here, *except* in the woods, in forty years. But in the woods I sometimes used to go a good ways."

"I've no doubt of that. How would you like to make a visit to New York?"

"I should like it very much—only it would cost such a lot, you know."

"Suppose your expenses were paid?"

"Well, that would be different."

"How much, in cash, will you take for your whiskers, Mr. Turner?"

"Now what the devil do you mean by that? Are you making fun of me?"

"Not at all. I was wondering if fifty dollars more, down, would induce you to shave off your whiskers."

"Humph! Jest tell me what you are getting at and I'll answer you."

"This: I want to disguise myself so that I look like you. I want to go out in the mountains as you would go out. While I am making believe that I am Bill Turner, I want you to take a trip to New York, and to live there, at my house, and take it easy, see all the sights, go to the theaters and the museums, and all that, until I return, and I want you to shave off your whiskers, and let me blacken your brows and otherwise make some changes in your appearance, so that if any of the people from Calomont should happen to meet you in the street down there they wouldn't say, 'Why, there is Bill Turner!' Would you consent to do that?"

"For another fifty dollars down?"

"Yes."

"I would. When do you want me to shave?"

"I will tell you in good time. First, I want you to fix up those plans."

"Hadn't I better git about it right now?"

"Yes. I think you had. And I will remain here with you while you do it in order that you may explain things to me as you work upon them."

"That's a good idee, too. I can make you know them mountings as well as I do, in a short time. I knows 'em so well——"

"That reminds me. Do you happen to know by sight, or have an acquaintance with, any of the members of that gang?"

The old man shifted uneasily in his chair, and at last he replied:

"I know one of them—purty well. He calls himself Handsome."

"Good! What does Handsome know about you, Bill?"

"He don't know nothin' about me, 'cept that I'm a woodsman, and that I'm too old to do him any harm. I helped him once, and once he helped me a leetle, and we're sort of friends. But I ain't never seen him but twice in my life, and then both times I met him in the woods, so I ain't never mentioned nothin' about him to other folks."

"That's splendid! It is just what I hoped. It couldn't be better!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE PLAN OF THE MOUNTAIN CAVERN.

"I want you now," said the detective, "to tell me what you talked about when you and Handsome met each other those two times in the woods."

"That's easy. The first time, I was walking through the woods, up about where you are going—that is, it was in that region—when I heard somebody hollerin' fur help. At first I couldn't tell for the life of me where the hollerin' come from; but after a leetle I located it up

on the side of one of them steep hils, and so I crawled up there. Well, when I got there, I found that a man had slid into a hole in the rocks, and that he couldn't git out nohow. If I hadn't happened along the chances are that he'd starved before he'd ha' been helped out."

"And as it was—what?"

"I helped him out. I didn't have no hatchet, but I had a good huntin'-knife along with me, and I managed to whittle down a good-sized spruce, which I trimmed so's to make a sort of ladder of it. When that was done I lowered the butt-end of it into the hole, and Handsome—that was who it was in the bottom of the hole—he climbed up so's I could get hold of him, and then I pulled him out. There wasn't much to that, was there?"

"It saved his life."

"Probably."

"Wasn't he grateful?"

"Suttingly."

"What did you talk about after that?"

"We sot down there a spell and chinned, that's all. He axed me who I was, and I told him. He axed me if I was long in these parts, and I told him allers. He axed me where I lived, and I told him about this cottage. That's all—only he said he was a hobo, and that he was called Handsome. I allowed that the people who called him that lied mightily; but I didn't say so jest then."

"What more was talked about?"

"Nothin'."

"When was the next time you saw him?"

"That was in the middle of the summer, and it was farther south—not far from the railroad-tracks."

"Well, what happened then?"

"That was the time he helped me."

"How was that?"

"I can't never tell you exactly how it was, but somehow I had got my foot wedged in the root of a tree, and I had been tryin' an hour to git it out without success. The tree was hard, and I was just tacklin' that root with my knife—I'd have cut through it in about an hour, I reckon—when 'long comes that feller Handsome that I had saved from the hole in the rocks. He had an ax on his shoulder, and when he spied me he stopped, and laughed, and laughed until I got mad.

"'Caught in yer own trap, ain't ye?' he axed me.

"'I be,' says I. 'You've got a ax, and mebby you kin help me out o' it.'

"Well, he did. He chopped the root in a jiffy, and I was free; but, bless you, I could 'a' done it myself with my knife in a hour, anyhow. All the same, I was grateful to him, and we sot down on a log and chinned for a while."

"What about?"

"He asked me what I was doing around there, and I told him that I was thinking of looking over the swamp below the tracks a leetle, with some idea of settin' traps there late this fall and winter, and he said as how he wouldn't advise me to do it. He said as how I wouldn't be likely to ketch the sort of animals I was after, and that some of the animals might ketch me; and, as I ain't exactly a fule, I ketched on to what he meant, and I ain't been nigh that place since. And then it turned out afterward as I thought it would, them hoboes had a hidin'-place in that very swamp."

"Right you are, Bill!" said Nick, laughing. "Is that all the conversation you had with Handsome?"

"Every bit of it."

"And you have never seen him since?"

"Never. Hold on; he axed me that time if I had ever mentioned the fact of our fust meetin', and I told him I had not. He seemed pleased at that, and he told me never to mention it. I allowed that I didn't see no reason why I should, and he laughed at that and seemed entirely satisfied."

"That is excellent, Bill. Now, we will get at those plans. I don't want to lose any time."

"Would you mind telling me why you axed me all about them two meetings?"

"Not at all. When I go out into the woods in the character of Bill Turner, I am likely at some time to run across Handsome himself. I want to be posted, so that he won't know but what I am you. I don't want him to catch me; see?"

"Yes. But do you suppose you kin fix yourself to look enough like me so's he won't know the difference when he sees you?"

"Certainly."

The old man shook his head.

"I don't believe it," he said, "but maybe you can. How about the voice? Your voice ain't no more like mine than a——"

"I can do that, too," replied Nick, exactly simulating the voice in which the old man was speaking; and he looked around him in wonder, and then at the detective.

"It does beat all!" he said at last. "I guess you're some too many for me, sir."

"Shall we get at those plans now?"

"Right away."

Turner brought out paper and pencil, and, having cleared the top of his table, he began to work.

First he drew a large circle on the paper, and at one edge of it he made a cross.

"That there cross is Calomont," he said. "Where we be now; and all that's inside of the ring I've made lies to the east of here, from nor'-nor'east to sou'-sou'east—*and* east. You understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, jest about in the middle o' that ring is the place where I think them fellers would hide. It's the best place for them."

"Tell me about it before you draw anything; or, rather, talk while you are drawing."

"That's jest what I'm going to do. Now, you follow my pencil and pay attention."

"Go ahead," said Nick.

"When you leave here—*if* you start from Calomont, which I suppose you will—you start right about here. You take a general direction nor'east from here at first. You'll find a path through the woods after you git about two miles from here, and that path will lead you several miles. But about here it'll disappear, and you won't have nothin' to guide you 'cept what I show you and tell you now."

"Exactly," replied the detective.

"Up here, at about the time you lose all trace o' the path, you'll come to a deep ravine. You want to follow up the middle of that, to the top. And when you git to the top of it you will think that you have run up ag'inst a cliff, and there ain't no gettin' out of it without goin' back.

"But that ain't so. There's a waterfall at the end of the ravine. It comes around a sort of a twist in the rocks, and if you ain't afraid of gettin' damp, you follow around there, and you will find as nice a piece of steps cut in them stones as you ever saw in your life. Indians cut 'em more'n a hundred years ago, so I'm told.

"Well, they take you to the top of that cliff. When you're up there, you find you're in another ravine, not so deep as t'other. Right here that would be," he added, making a mark with the pencil.

"All right," said Nick.

"About a mile farther up that second ravine you want to leave it. You'll find a big dead oak that hangs out over it, and beside the dead oak there is a path up the side of the ravine. It is one of my own paths. You get up it by hangin' onto two things you find there for the purpose. I put 'em there more'n twenty years ago, mister."

"Go ahead."

"When you git to the top, you want to branch off this way—so. You'll find a clearin' about there, and off to the east you'll see some high hills. You want to make for them."

"And those hills, I suppose, is my destination."

"That's where the caves are. That's where you will find the gang if they are hiding anywhere in that 'ere region."

"Now, tell me about the caverns. Tell me how to find them."

"They're easy enough to find—some of 'em is; others ain't. Wait a minute."

He pushed that paper aside, and took a fresh one.

"Now, when you come to the hills, you will approach 'em at what we call the 'Dog's Nose.' So named because that's what it looks like. It's a rock that sticks out right about here, and you can't miss it. It looks exactly like a dog's nose, stickin' out and smelling things.

"You want to go right up under that there dog's nose; and when you git there you'll see a hole in the rock that ain't no bigger than the lower half of that window. It's a leetle bit of a hole, and it's as dark as a pocket inside it, too. Nobody, even if they found the hole, would ever think of going in there. It ain't invitin' to look at."

"How did you happen to go into it?"

"I didn't. I came out of it. I got lost in that cave for three days once, when I was a boy, and when I found my way out I came out of that hole. Nobody knows about that entrance but me, though I suppose lots of folks knows it's there."

"And it communicates with the cave?"

"It does. It'll take you to any part of the cave; and there is only one rule to follow in going through it. You'll want a light, though."

"I've got the light. What is the rule?"

"Always—no matter where you are in any of them caves, take the way to the right. Never take a gallery to the left, goin' in either or any direction. It's a rule that holds good in them caves. It's a sort of way that nature provided so's you could find your way through there; and I happened to discover what it was."

"It all sounds very simple and easy."

"And it is, if you've got the pluck and the sand. But it's a ticklish place. There is a good many places in there that I ain't never explored, and don't want to; and it's safe to bet that the hoboes ain't done it, neither. I reckon, mister, that that's about all I kin show you—hold on, though!"

"What now?"

"Well, there's one place up there which it might be handy for you to know about, and I don't think anybody but me knows about it, either."

"What is that?"

"Well, you might find occasion to want to hide yourself away while you are in there."

"That is more than likely, Bill."

"Well, just arter you pass through the hole that is under the Dog's Nose, and about twenty rods from there, you'll find a place where there is a boulder sort of set into the rocks. You won't notice it unless you look for it, but it is there. Under it you'll find a small stone wedged fast. If you pull out that small stone, and then push on the big rock, it'll swing around like it was on a pivot, and you kin step inside the hole it leaves, and close up the door after you. You'll find an interestin' place in there, too, if you ever have occasion to use it, mister; and nobody will find you there, either."

CHAPTER V.

BLACK MADGE'S FIRST LIEUTENANT.

The detective passed the remainder of that day, and much of the night, in old Bill Turner's company, and during that time they talked incessantly about the mountains to which Nick was going, about the caverns in those mountains, and the trails through them; and when the conversation was finished Nick felt that he could find his way without difficulty wherever he cared to go among them.

When he saw that the old man was tired out, he sent him to bed, and himself dropped upon a couch in Turner's living-room, where he slept like a top till morning.

Soon after dawn they were both astir; and after they had eaten some breakfast, and Turner had made his usual pilgrimage to the post-office, they began again upon the plans and went over them for the last time.

And then came the task of making the changes in their personal appearance.

This, to the layman, sounds like no easy task; but to Nick Carter it was merely the practising of an art of which he was thoroughly a master.

He had brought with him the things necessary to accomplish the changes; and when the old man returned from the village he set to work—first upon himself—for he knew that he must make his own disguise letter perfect if he hoped to deceive such a man as Handsome.

He first made up his face, not with paints, but with stains that would not wash off, to represent the leathery, weather-beaten countenance of the old man; and here he was, perhaps, fortunate in the fact that the profusion of white whiskers worn by the old man rendered his face the easier to copy, and in reality concealed much of it from view.

Then he adjusted the beard.

But not as false beards are supposed to be adjusted. This one was almost hair by hair. That is, the beard was divided into parts of hair, and each tuft was stuck on with a glue of Nick's own creation, so that there was no danger that it would drop off under any circumstances —and so that it could not be pulled off without drawing patches of skin with it.

And this was as it should be, since if any one should suspect that the whiskers might be false, and should seize them and pull sharply upon them, they would resist the pull exactly as if the beard was natural.

In height the two men were about the same.

In figure, the old man was possibly somewhat stouter than Nick; but there was not enough difference to be noticeable.

The detective expected about three hours in which to [illegible] on particulars, was to about [illegible] was finished to [illegible] was perfect.

[illegible] indeed, that Turner regarded him in amazement; then came closer to look into his eyes, and at last he said:

"I'm glad, Mr. Carter, that I didn't meet you on the street in that rig. It would have frightened me to death. I'd have been sure that I was dead and had met my own ghost, out for a walk."

That night, when the train bound for the city passed through Calomont at half-past eleven, a man climbed aboard of it who—if anybody had noticed him particularly—it would have been supposed was the same French Canadian lumberman who had appeared there the day before.

But there was no one there save the ticket-agent, and he did not notice particularly. It is certain that he had no idea that in the black-haired man who went away was old Bill Turner.

But so it was.

Nick had made the old man up in a representation of the Frenchman; or at least near enough to it so that in the darkness the difference would not be noticed; and the old man, being made to appear young, really felt young, and he went away joyously.

In his pockets he carried letters; one was to Chick, and the other was to Joseph, in case Chick should happen not to be at home when Turner arrived there.

And those letters gave instructions that Turner was to be treated to everything he wanted, and that Chick and Ten-Ichi should take turns in showing him about the city.

Nick assured them that they could help him quite as much in that way as if they were among the mountains with him, assisting him in the actual work.

And the next morning—the morning after the departure of Turner—Nick took the old man's place in the customary stroll, or hobble would be a better word, to the post-office.

He stopped and talked with people as he met them, having posted himself, with the old man's aid, in what he was to say. And he stood around the post-office steps for two hours, as Turner was in the habit of doing.

He was trying out the part; trying it on the dog, so to speak. And he was thoroughly satisfied with the result.

In his talks there in front of the post-office he gave it out that he was going to take another trip into the woods; and as it was the season of the year when Turner had been in the habit of being absent, no surprise was felt.

And that afternoon he literally pulled up stakes and started.

Once he was in the woods, he quickened his pace. He realized now that figuratively he had burned his bridges behind him, and that he must see the thing through to the end.

He did not fear the consequences at all; he felt that

there was only an chance of his failure, and that was in the shrewd eyes and keen intelligence of Handsome.

Handsome had met Turner twice and talked with him each time.

Nick knew Handsome well enough to know that the outlaw would have studied Turner very closely at those interviews; the question now was, would Handsome detect the fraud?

Nick did not think it likely; and, anyhow, the risk had to be taken.

That night the detective made himself a fire and camped in the woods; in the early morning he started on again.

In due course of time he came to the ravine, and went up it to the top as the old man had directed him to do.

And he went around the "rocks with a sort of a twist in them" until he found the steps that were cut in the stones, and so mounted to the top.

Far up the second ravine he found the dead tree that hung over it, and the pathway up the side of the hill beside it; and that night he camped again in the woods.

He had not far to go that second morning, after he had eaten some breakfast, before he arrived at the Dog's Nose. It was ten o'clock in the morning when he got there.

All that morning Nick had noticed signs that he was approaching the region where he would find the hobo camp. He had seen where trees had been chopped down and cut up for fire-wood; and there were many other signs that many men were in the vicinity.

When he came to the shelter of the Dog's Nose, he stopped there, and, having fixed himself a temporary camp, resolved that he would remain there until night, for he had some hope that some of the hoboes would happen along, and that he could talk with them.

That was his game. Not to sneak upon them unawares, but to let it be known that he was in the neighborhood, so that Handsome would come to him. He wanted that ordeal over with Handsome as soon as possible.

He was destined not to be disappointed.

The afternoon was well advanced when Handsome suddenly stepped out of a cluster of balsams, and stood before him.

He had approached as silently as an Indian; as if he had gained his life in woodcraft, and, indeed, Nick had no doubt that he had.

For a moment he stood there near the balsams, silently regarding the detective; and Nick, perfectly acting the part of Turner, looked up and nodded, but said nothing.

After a little Handsome strode forward, no longer taking care to remain quiet; and he seated himself on a log near Nick, and facing him, while at the same time he toyed with apparent carelessness with a revolver he held in his hand.

"What brings you here, Turner?" he asked at last.

"The season of the year brings me," was the reply. "I have come here every autumn at this time for more'n fifty years."

"Indeed!" Handsome looked at him with new interest. "Is that true?" he asked.

"I wouldn't have any reason to lie to ye, would I?" asked Nick. "Old Bill Turner hasn't missed a year in fifty years in coming here, Mr. Handsome."

"Then you must know these hills mighty well, eh?"

"I know every inch of 'em; every leaf that falls on 'em, almost. That's the way I know 'em."

"And do you know about the places under the hills as well?"

"Do you mean the caves?"

"I do."

"I know 'em purty well—yes. There is some parts of 'em that nobody knows, I reckon; and while I—well, maybe I don't know all about 'em, and maybe I'd get lost in 'em now; only I don't think so."

"What do you know about that hole up there, under that rock that is shaped like the nose of a dog?"

"I know it's a hole. I reckon that's about all that anybody knows about it. It's a dark sort of a place. I ain't got no fancy for goin' into it."

"Does it connect with the main part of the cavern?"

"Maybe it does, and maybe it doesn't; but most likely it does; only I don't think that anybody would be after trying to find out."

"You have never been through that hole, then?"

"I ain't never been inside of it," replied Nick, with perfect truth.

Handsome thought a moment, and then he asked suddenly:

"Turner, who sent you up here?"

"Nobody sent me; why?"

"Didn't the people of Calomont send you to find me and my followers?"

"Nary a bit of it."

"Well, now that you have seen me, and know that I am here, and therefore guess that others are here with me, what would you do about it if you should go back to Calomont now, and somebody there should ask you if you had seen me?"

"Look here, Handsome, I don't meddle with other people's affairs. I want 'em to leave mine alone, and consequently I leave their'n alone. You hear me speak!"

"But what answer would you make if that question was asked of you?"

"I probably shouldn't answer at all."

"Suppose an answer was insisted upon?"

"I ain't never found nobody yet who could make old Bill Turner answer a question if he didn't want to."

"Do you mean that you would not wish to answer that question?"

"Look here, Handsome, if you want me to promise that I won't tell on ye, why don't you say so? What you and your fellers do ain't none of my funeral, so long as you leave me alone. Do you think I came up here to spy on you?"

"That is what I thought when I first discovered you."

"Well, forget it. I ain't carryin' no tales. I'd 'a' been dead long ago if I had done that. Life's too short. I ain't never mentioned to nobody about the two times I have met you, and I ain't likely to, either. I ain't got time. You ain't robbed my house, and I don't care what you do as long as you leave me alone."

Again Handsome was silent a while, and then he said suddenly:

"Turner, would you like to go to our camp?"

"No; that is, I ain't particular about it. You might think I was trying to spy on ye—or some of the men might, and that would make me mad."

"They won't think anything of the kind if I take you there."

"All right. If you want me to go—I'll go."

"Come along, then. You have got this far, and we've either got to trust you, or kill you. It will depend upon your which that will be."

CHAPTER VI.

PATSY IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH.

Keeping in his mind's eye the plans that Turner had made for him, Nick knew perfectly the route over which Handsome led him on the way to the camp, to which he had referred.

It was a picturesque place. Turner had described it in detail to the detective, and had mentioned it as the most likely place for the outlaws to make their headquarters. He had said:

"Ye see, mister, it's a sort of sasser in the mountings. There ain't only one way to git to it from the outside, and that is a purty hard one; so hard that half a dozen men could hold it agin' a thousand; and the other way to get to it is through the caves; and ye've got to know them galleries mighty well in order to find yer way through. I think you'll do it, because you act as if you had been in caves afore."

The place was a "sasser" in the mountains, sure enough.

On every side of it there were frowning cliffs, which rose hundreds of feet in the air; and these cliffs were as impassable from the outside as they were from the saucer itself. There was only one pathway, and that was through a narrow fissure, barely wide enough for one big man to walk through it.

And this latter could have been stopped up with rocks in half an hour, so that nothing could get through it.

Handsome made the supposed Turner walk in front of him when they entered the fissure; and thus it was that they appeared on the opposite side of it; then Handsome took the lead.

Already the hoboes had erected cabins of slabs and of logs; and many of them were still at work building others; but as with one accord they ceased to work when they saw Handsome approaching with the old man; and they stared at him.

"Have you got another one, Handsome?" somebody called out to him; but Handsome deigned no reply, passing on in silence, and leading the way to a cabin that was larger and better than the others, and which stood exactly in the center of the miniature valley.

Nick guessed that this was the temporary home of Black Madge, and he was, therefore, not at all surprised when she stepped out upon the porch in front of it.

Nor had she lost one whit of her fierce beauty since Nick had seen her.

She showed her white and even teeth, and smiled, in her own bold way, as Handsome approached her, with Nick in tow; and she asked, as soon as they were near enough:

"Whom have we here?"

"It is the old chap I have told you about, Madge," replied Handsome.

"Sent here to spy upon us, I suppose," she smiled scornfully. "Why didn't you shoot him at once instead of bringing him here?"

Before Handsome could reply, Nick wheeled upon him.

"Didn't I tell ye so?" he demanded, with a show of anger. "Didn't I tell ye so? Didn't I say that they be thinking that I was a spy; but you wouldn't have it so? Tell me that."

"I don't think he is a spy, Madge," said Handsome. "Remember that I have known him for a considerable time. And I have found him on the level."

Madge shrugged her shoulders.

"All right," she said. "That is, all right this time. Only now that he is here, he stays. Don't forget that."

"Oh, I haven't forgotten that."

"Nobody leaves this valley without my permission; not a single one."

"They are all pretty well satisfied that you mean that, Madge."

"Now, tell me what you brought the old man here for."

"Because he knows every inch of the galleries inside those caves. I want to know about them myself, and I want the old man to teach me about them. The time will come, Madge, when we will be mighty glad to know about those galleries."

"Possibly so," she replied. "Do as you like with him; only remember—*nobody* leaves this valley without my

permission. When I get the men thoroughly organized and so they will do what I want them to do, then I will turn loose upon the world one of the best—and the worst—criminal organizations that has ever been heard of. Do what you please with the old man. He looks old enough to have been dead long ago."

"And as old as I am, madam, I've never before heard a woman speak so to me," said Nick, as if he were hurt by it.

Madge turned to him quickly.

"You mustn't mind what I say—always, Turner," she said. "I have a habit of speaking harshly at times; but I am not unkind to those who are true to me. Do you happen to know a man who is named Nick Carter?"

She asked the question suddenly, as if she expected the utterance of the name would make the supposed Turner start with surprise; but Nick looked at her quite calmly, and replied:

"I know the name. He's a detective chap, ain't he? I heerd about him; something about that bank robbery, but I mostly forgit what it was."

"Is he in Calomont now, Turner?"

"No, ma'am; he ain't."

"You speak positively."

"Well, I know he wasn't there when I came out of town; and I didn't hear that he was expected there, nuther. And if he had been expected there I'd a heerd it. There ain't nothin' goin' on in that town that I don't hear about."

"Do you know if he has been sent for?"

"I ain't heerd nothin' about his bein' sent for, ma'am."

"If, some day, I should decide to send you into the village to do some errands for me, do you suppose you could make some inquiries about Nick Carter for me, and at the same time forget all that you know about us, who are here?"

"I reckon I could, ma'am."

"I'll think about it. I may want to use you," she said; and turned away. But she stopped and turned toward them again, calling to Handsome, who went to her side; for Nick could hear the conversation that passed between them.

"What about that fellow Pat?" she heard Madge inquire; and he could barely refrain from giving a start that might have betrayed him, for that question told him plainly that Patsy had already managed to arrive among the outlaws, and—that his fate still hung in the balance. He listened eagerly for Handsome's reply.

"I haven't had a chance to examine him yet," he said. "You wished me to talk with him before I brought him to you."

"We will bring him here now. Leave Turner here with me until you return."

"Get up there on the porch and sit down, Turner," he said. "Smoke your pipe if you wish to. The queen won't object. I'll be back in a moment."

But when Handsome had hurried away to bring Patsy, and Nick had seated himself upon a rustic chair, Madge came and stood in front of him.

"Turner," she said severely. "Tell me the truth now. What brought you into this neighborhood?"

"The season of the year brought me," Nick replied to her as he had done to Handsome.

"Who sent you?"

"Nobody sent me, ma'am."

"Swear to that."

"'Tain't necessary. I have said it."

"Do you know what would happen to you if I should find that you were acting as a spy?"

"I suppose I could guess."

"I'd have you burned at the stake, just as Indians used to burn their captives."

"Well, ma'am, I reckon I've lived too long a time now to be much afraid of death. When a man has passed eighty, he ain't much afraid of things."

"Are you as old as that?"

"Old Bill Turner is eighty-four, ma'am; but he don't look it, does he?"

"No. I wish I could feel sure of you. I wish I could feel sure that you are not a spy."

"Well, ma'am, it's my experience that we can't somehow help our feelings much. If you are in doubt about it, treat it as you would an earache—with silent contempt. Doubts, ma'am, are suthin' like boils; they're the devil and all while you've got 'em; but they do get well arter a while. You ain't got no call to doubt old Bill Turner, as I knows on."

"I'll talk with you again, Turner. In the meantime, see that you walk in a straight line."

"I can't do that no more. My old feet ain't so steady as they used to be. But I'll do the best I can."

"We can't ask anybody to do more than that. Now keep silent. Here comes Handsome with another man who I fear may be a spy."

Patsy, with his hair a brick-red, and with spots and freckles on his face that were a sight to see, came forward at that moment, led by Handsome.

His hands were tied together behind his back, and he looked as if he had been treated rather badly. However, there was a grin upon his face as he approached, and ducked his head in what was intended to be a polite bow to the queen of the outlaws.

"So you have come back again?" she demanded of him abruptly.

"Yes, I'm back, your honor—I mean, ma'am," he replied, grinning the more.

"Where have you been while you were away, then? Tell me that?"

"Well, sure, your majesty, I was a-runnin' most of the time. When the fire broke out down there, and the divil to pay generally, they all thinkin' as how it was y'rsilf that was bein' burrnt to death inside the cottage, I helped all I could until it was found out that it wasn't you, at all, at all, but a dummy that had been fixed up to look like you. And then when the hull bunch of the spalpeens went crazy and tried to find out what had become of you, it wasn't long until I found out that I was all alone in that place, the rest having gone in search of you. And after that I thought it wasn't healthy for me around there."

"I think you're a spy, Pat," she said coldly.

"Divil a bit of it. Who says so? Don't you belave it!"

"Why did you not stay with the rest of the men, then?"

"Divil a wan of me can tell that same, now. I clean forget. I think I was scared out of me two wits. If I had been a long time wid yez, instid of bein' there only wan day, sure I'd have remained, so I would. But I'd been there so little that I thought it wasn't healthy for me. That's all."

"What made you come back now?"

"Sure I heard that ye'd escaped from your jailers, and I knowed that you'd be after protecting me. Didn't you tell me that I was all right? And, thinks I, if I can find 'em now, sure the quane will be after takin' care of me; and here I am."

"When I heard that you had returned, I made up my mind to have you shot!"

"Oh, glory be to gracious! Don't be after doin' that same, your honor! Faith, why should ye be after shootin' the likes of me? I ain't done nothin' at all."

Patsy, with a perfect assumption of fright, fell upon his knees before the woman and raised his hands beseechingly to her.

And for a moment she looked down upon him with cold contempt in her eyes. It was evident to Nick, who was watching the scene narrowly, that she was coldly calculating the chances of letting him live, and that a breath upon the scales either way would decide her.

For a long time she remained in the same attitude, and then she raised her head and spoke to Handsome.

"When one in my position is in any doubt," she said coldly, "there is only one thing to do, and that is to give myself, not the other person, the benefit of the doubt. That is what I have decided to do, Handsome. Take him away."

"What shall I do with him?"

"Take him back to the cabin where he was tied up, and tie him up again. To-night, when the fires are lit, we will convene a court and try him. I will be the judge at that trial, and after it is over we will probably hang him. I see no other way. Take him away. Go."

CHAPTER VII.

BLACK MADGE GIVES JUDGMENT.

It was a strange scene upon which the light of a huge camp-fire shone that night, in the mountain retreat of the outlaws.

A stake had been set in the ground, and to this Patsy was tied, so that all could see him plainly.

Somewhat to one side, on a huge rustic chair made by one of the men, the queen was seated in state, ready to act as judge at the trial that was to begin, and a hobo who was known by the suggestive name of Creation Mike, and who hated Patsy because of a row they had had when as Pat he was in this same gang once before, was selected as prosecuting attorney.

A jury of twelve of the men had been drawn, only it was a foregone conclusion that they would bring in their verdict according as the queen should direct.

Handsome acted as master of ceremonies, and around them was gathered the entire membership of Black Madge's Hobo Gang—as villainous a looking crew as might be imagined.

As yet, no one had been appointed to defend Pat, and now Madge raised one hand, when she was ready to begin the trial, and she announced:

"There is no one who has offered to act as attorney for the prisoner. This trial will afford you some amusement, my men. We will have a good time out of it, anyhow, before we hang him. I will appoint counsel for him."

They were all silent, waiting, and presently she spoke again.

"I will name the old man there, Bill Turner, as counsel for the defense. Will you defend the man, Turner?"

"I'll try to, madam, though I don't know anything about the case. He may be guilty for all I know. What is he charged with?"

"With being a spy."

"If you want me to defend him, I'll do my best."

"Go ahead, then. Let the trial begin," she ordered.

The prosecution took up the case; that is, Cremation Mike got upon his feet and began to make a speech to the jury. He said:

"We've got proof enough that the man is a spy, ain't we, mates? We all know what happened down in the swamp, the time that Nick Carter got among us, and carried away Black Madge almost before our eyes, and we none the wiser for it. We know how Nick Carter set the cottage afire after drugging Madge, and how then he fixed up a dummy in one of the windows, so that we would think that she was burning up. We know that, don't we, mates?

"And don't we know that there were four men who came to our camp in the swamp at the same time, and who came together? Wasn't one of that four Nick Carter himself? And were not two others of that same

four Nick Carter's assistants? And who was the fourth one of that four? Why, it was that cove there, tied to the stake, and waiting for you to hang him.

"Would he have been in that sort of company if he hadn't been made out of the same kind of cloth? Didn't he come there with that other outfit? Didn't we prove—that is, didn't Madge prove that one of the four was Nick Carter; that another of the four was his assistant who is called Chick? And that still another of the four was another assistant who is called Ten-Ichi?

"And don't you know that Nick Carter has got still another assistant, and that his other assistant is named Patsy? Haven't you heard of that?

"It is true. And so is this fellow's name Pat—or Patsy. It is all the same.

"Now, again, didn't they come there together? Didn't Handsome find them camping in the woods, waiting for a chance to get to our camp, and didn't this fellow tell him the first one of the bunch that he was looking for Hobo Harry, the Beggar King—and ain't Hobo Harry and Black Madge one and the same?

"I tell you there ain't any doubt that the man is a spy, and that he ought to be hanged.

"Now do you gang remember what happened the night of the fire, the time when Nick Carter got away with Madge, and took her to jail, where they managed to keep her thirty-six hours? I'll remind you of it.

"Don't you remember that when we found the other two out, they were sent to the quicksand pit? I was one of those who helped to throw them into the quicksand pit. Did you ever hear of anybody's getting out of that pit alive?

"I never did recall that incident; but I have found out since that both those assistants, Chick and Ten-Ichi, are alive and kicking, down in New York, this very day.

"Well, who got 'em out of that quicksand pit, then? Why, this fellow! That is where he was, and what he was doing while we were fighting the fire, and don't you forget it!

"We was all too busy to remember about the men we had chucked into the sand; but he didn't forget. For why? Because he was one of them himself, and because he had determined all along to go to that pit as soon as ever he could, and get them out of it.

"How'd he get 'em out, you ask? I don't know. I only know that he did get 'em out somehow, for they are out. I know that for certain."

Nick, in the character of Turner, leaped to his feet.

"I object!" he cried out. "This man ain't tryin' this case fair. I don't know who he is and I don't hear a case; I only know that you appointed me to defend him, and I'm a-goin' to do it till you tell me to stop.

"I object, ma'am, to the course he is adoptin'. It ain't fair. He's making a lot of statements for which he ain't got a shadow of proof about. I don't know anything about that air fire he speaks about, 'ceptin' what I've heard down at Calomont. But we ain't got the fire here as a witness; and we ain't got the quicksand here as a witness; and we ain't got the two men as he says was saved from it here as witnesses. And unless he can produce witnesses to testify to what he says about them air escapes, I move that the hull speech be made to stricken out, your honor. Let him call his witnesses to the stand, and swear 'em, or swear at 'em. Let him do sullin, 'cept standing up there and shootin' off his mouth."

Madge smiled grimly. She was getting more enjoyment out of this affair than she had anticipated.

"Call your witnesses, Mike," she said.

"I ain't got none, Madge, to swear to what I have said, but every one here knows it is the solemn truth. I don't need no witnesses. However, I'll put Handsome on the stand for a minute, about the way the bunch arrived at our camp, if you say so."

"I think it would be a good idea. It would be more regular."

"All right, Madge. Handsome, take the stand. Hold up your right hand, and swear that you'll tell the truth. That's all right. Now, did you hear what I said about your findin' that outfit in the woods north of the track?"

"I did."

"Wasn't it the dead-level truth?"

"It was."

"The hull four was there, warn't they?"

"They were."

"And they was all strangers?"

"They were."

"You never seen any one of them afore that time, had you?"

"Never."

"And later, wasn't it found out that three of 'em were spies?"

"It was."

"And wasn't one of the spies Nick Carter himself?"

"Yes."

"And weren't the other two his assistants?"

"They were."

"Didn't they confess it?"

"They did."

"And weren't they afterward thrown into the quicksand pit to die?"

"They were."

"Did they die there?"

"I don't think they did."

"Don't you know that they escaped?"

"I'm reasonably certain of it."

"How did they escape?"

"I don't know that."

"Isn't it your opinion that this galoot here——"

"I object!" shouted Nick.

"Oh, well," exclaimed Mike, in disgust, "ask him some questions yourself, then."

"I will. Handsome, when did you first see them four in the woods north o' the track?"

"Oh, I don't know. Before dark that night."

"Was they together?"

"Part of the time."

"Only part o' the time? What do you mean by that?"

"They didn't come there together."

"Oh, didn't they? Where was you?"

"I was hiding, and watching them."

"So you saw 'em all when they arrived there, did you?"

"Yes."

"Who got there first?"

"This man—Pat."

"Did the others appear to know him?"

"No; but they didn't appear to know each other, either."

"But if they were spies, and you afterward proved that they were, and if they got there, and found Pat already there, it would be natural that they should act as if they didn't know each other, wouldn't it, in order to deceive him?"

"I suppose so."

"Have you ever seen anything suspicious about the prisoner?"

"No; only his disappearance after the fire and the arrest of Madge."

"P'raps he kin explain that."

"He can't. He has tried already. You heard him. I don't call that an explanation, but it is probably the best he can give."

"Would you be afraid to trust him now?"

"Personally? I don't think I would."

"Then, personally, you don't think that he is a spy?"

"No; but I don't *know* that he isn't."

"That'll do. I don't want to ask you any more questions." He turned to Cremation Mike. "Have you got any more witnesses?" he asked.

"No," with a grin. "I don't need no more."

"Maybe not. But I've got one witness."

"Oh! Have you. Who is it?"

"I'm going to put the prisoner on the stand."

But Madge was plainly tired of the amusement already.

She rose in her place, and her eyes were flashing darkly.

"We will stop this farce here and now," she said. "It won't do any good, anyhow. I can see plainly enough that there are some here who believe he is a spy. I have a good deal of that opinion myself; and as there is a doubt in my mind, I'll just settle the thing right now. Jury, you can find the man guilty. That's what he is, you boldly."

"Guilty," said the jury, with one voice, and grinning.

"Prisoner," continued Madge, "you have got until to-morrow morning, at nine o'clock, to live. At that time the boys will take you to some convenient tree, and hang you by the neck until you're dead—and that settles it."

CHAPTER VIII.

PATSY'S NARROW ESCAPE.

Things looked dark for Patsy Bolivar, as Patsy sometimes facetiously called himself.

It was quite evident that Black Madge was in deadly earnest in what she had said.

One life more or less was absolutely nothing to her, and if there was the breath of a suspicion against one, it was, from her standpoint, better to put that one out of the way at once than to run any sort of risk by permitting him to live.

It was a condition where the "benefit of the doubt"—which, by the way, is a maxim of the criminal law that is never practised—was literally twisted about, and made to serve the prosecution instead of the prisoner.

Nor did the hoboes who had gathered there to hear and to witness the trial hesitate to voice their sentiments about it by loud cheering when Madge uttered the sentence of death.

It would be a hanging, indeed, and it did not make much difference to them who was hung. It has been said before that they were much like wild beasts, or dogs, who are without any quality of compassion.

Dogs that have been friendly always will turn upon and kill another dog that is ill; and these hoboes were no different.

When Nick walked away from the scene of the trial near the fire, he found that Handsome was beside him, and then, before either uttered a word, Madge joined them.

She was smiling as if she were well pleased with her evening's work, and she said to the detective:

"You did well, Turner. One would suppose that you had at some time been a lawyer."

"I'd 'a' got the man free if I'd had a fair judge and jury," replied Nick boldly, stroking the white whiskers he wore.

Madge frowned. Then she laughed aloud.

"I like you for your boldness," she said. "But have a care that you do not find yourself suddenly in the same predicament, Turner."

"I'd be inclined to shoot myself afore I came to trial, if I should," Nick retorted.

They had reached Madge's cabin by this time, and now they mounted to the porch, and Nick pulled out an old pipe that Turner had given him, filled it, and lighted it.

The detective was determined in his own mind that before the dawn of another day he would find some way to save Patsy; but how it was to be done he had no idea.

He did not know yet what disposition they intended to make of him. For all he knew they might send him into one of the cabins and lock him up for the night. *But he did know that unless he acted, Patsy would be murdered at sunrise the following morning, and he did not intend to permit that to happen.*

"Miss Madge," he said, after a pause, during which he had smoked in silence, "if it is all the same to you, I'd like to know what you intend to do with me to-night. I'm an old man, and I'm sorter 'customed to going to bed rayther early, so, if you don't mind, and you'll tell me where I'm to sleep, I think I'll turn in."

Instead of replying directly to him, Madge turned to Handsome.

"What shall we do with him?" she asked. "You are responsible for his being here. I think I will turn him over to you."

"All right," said Handsome, rising. "I'll take him to my own cabin. He'll be safe enough there. I'll be back in a minute, Madge."

Nick followed him across the floor of the little valley to a hut that was at the opposite side of it, and close to the cliff—and Nick knew at once, from his recollection of the plan he had studied, that he was quite near to the entrance to the cavern.

The cabin consisted of only one room, in which two bunks had been roughly built, and, after lighting a candle, Handsome indicated one of these, and said:

"You can sleep there, Turner. Turn in when you like. To-morrow we will explore the caves together."

"Right you are," said Nick, yawning widely. "I sha'n't need any rocking this night. My old legs are tired out for sure."

Two minutes after the departure of Handsome, Nick blew out the candle, and for a time he stretched himself in the bunk, lest Handsome should return to see that all was right. But it was speedily evident to the detective that Handsome had no suspicion whatever of him, and had, therefore, left him to his own devices.

But Nick knew that it could not be very long before the outlaw would return to seek his own rest and repose, and that he must, therefore, determine upon what he was to do before he should return.

Ten minutes he lay there, and then he rose slowly and cautiously from the bunk and crept to the door which had been left open, and peered out.

The fires were still blazing merrily, and many of the men were gathered around them. Some of the men were playing cards, and the others were engaged in various ways. At all events, they one and all seemed to have forgotten his existence, and that was what he chiefly desired.

Nick knew in which cabin Patsy was a prisoner. He could see it from the doorway where he was standing, almost opposite him at the other side of the valley. The distance in feet from his own position was about the distance of a city block—two hundred feet.

The old silver watch, the size of a turnip, which Turner had carried forty years or more, was in his pocket, and by the light of the stars Nick managed to see the time—ten o'clock.

"There is no time like the present," he mused to himself, while he hesitated in the doorway. "If I wait until all is quiet, I will stand all the more chance of being discovered; and, besides, it won't be long until Handsome returns here, and after he has come and crawled into his bunk it will be next to impossible for me to get out of here without rousing him—unless I should drug him, and that will not do at all.

"Handsome is altogether too fly for that. He would know that he had been drugged.

"Now, if it wasn't for these white whiskers, I could creep around the edge of the bottom of the cliff to the cabin where Patsy is, without being noticed; and I dare not take them off——"

He stopped there. There was absolutely no use in conjecturing upon the "ifs" of the question, and so, after another moment, during which he studied the lay of the land intently, he slipped noiselessly out at the door and around behind the cabin, and from there crept on his hands and knees to the bottom of the cliffs.

And there he discovered what he had been unable to see in the imperfect light. The grass there was quite tall, where it had not been trampled by the feet of the motley crew that infested the place, and he found that by lying at full length and pulling himself slowly along on his stomach he would be able to conceal himself almost entirely from view.

It has been said that fortune favors the brave. It would be more to the point if the saying were: "Fortune favors the persistent."

Anyhow, Nick Carter made that half-circle of the small valley, crawling in that way, and entirely without being discovered; and in that manner he arrived directly in the rear of the cabin where Patsy was a prisoner.

But here a new difficulty confronted him.

There was a guard in front of the door, and that guard, strangely enough, was Cremation Mike—Cremation Mike, who hated Patsy because once, during the pursuit of that other case, Patsy had throttled him, and

because it was in his blood to hate everybody. Mike was one of the surly kind, who delights to see other people suffer.

The cabin in which Patsy was a prisoner was built of roughly hewn logs, the crevices and chinks being stopped with mud and clay. The ground beneath it was hard—rocky, in fact; so there was no possibility of digging under the logs without tools to do it, and even then it would have taken too much time to accomplish it.

Nick turned his attention to Cremation Mike.

He was seated upon a convenient stump, smoking a short pipe. His back was toward the door of the cabin, and he was about ten feet from it. The door itself had been fastened by passing a freshly cut sapling across its front, and slipping either end of it into rustic slots that had been hastily fashioned for the purpose.

It was plain that there was only one way to get Patsy outside of that cabin, and that was to overcome Cremation Mike; and, having determined upon this, Nick crept forward as silently as a shadow, and so rounded the corner of the cabin, and presently came up half-standing, directly behind the unsuspecting outlaw.

Nick did not wish to kill the man, but he did want to knock him out effectually that he could not interfere in what was to follow, and therefore he had picked up a piece of round, smooth stone, which he had wrapped in his handkerchief.

And now, with this improvised weapon, he struck Cremation Mike sharply on the back of his head, with the result that Mike pitched forward, and would have fallen to the ground had not Nick managed to catch him.

Then he laid him down gently upon the ground, and turning swiftly, opened the door of the cabin.

"Quick, Patsy!" he called in a sharp whisper. "It is I. *Nick!* Come."

Patsy, who had not been bound, it seemed, leaped to the door with a low exclamation of surprise and pleasure.

"Bully, Nick," he whispered. "I thought it was all up with me that time, Nick. And do you know, it never once occurred to me that the old man might be you. The disguise is perfect."

"Come," said Nick. "There is no time for words now. Follow me, and do exactly as I do. I want to get back to my own station place before my absence is discovered, if it is possible to do so. See, first, if there are any sort of a chair or stool inside that cabin."

"Yes. A stool."

"Bring it out, if you know where to put your hand upon it."

Patsy brought it in a twinkling, and, placing it against the stump, Nick propped the senseless form of Mike upon it, so that from the front it appeared as if he were seated there quite naturally.

"He will come around presently," said Patsy, "and miss me."

"Let him. That is what I want him to do," replied Nick. "Come on, now."

He dropped upon his knees again, and, with Patsy following, they crept around through the grass again along the edge of the cliff, and at last reached the cabin from which the detective had started.

But he did not stop there.

He made at once for the entrance to the cavern, which was near at hand, and passed inside, with Patsy following closely behind him; and then, with his electric flash-light, he led the way along the corridor of the cave—for it was his object to find that hiding-place to which Turner had directed him in case he found it necessary to hide.

"Keep to the right always in that cave, no matter which way you are going," Turner had told him with emphasis, and remembering that now, while he wondered if, after all, there were two corridors to the cavern, he followed the rule and almost on a run—for the passage was quite smooth before them—he led the way through.

It is not necessary that we should describe that flight through the cavern. It was much shorter really than Nick had dared to hope; and although he knew absolutely nothing about it more than he had been able to determine by the plans Turner had drawn for him, he did believe implicitly in the old man—and the results proved that he had made no mistake.

They came at last to the boulder to which Turner had referred, and Nick removed the small stone from beneath it. And then he pushed upon it as Turner had directed, with the result that the rock swung open before them, leaving an aperture through which they could easily pass.

But Nick did not enter. Instead he thrust a match-box a box of matches into Patsy's grasp, and said to him:

"Remain here until I come for you, even if you get hungry. I don't know any more about what is ahead of you than you do. I only know that you will be safe there. We have no time to talk now. I will shut this rock behind you."

Then he turned and sped away.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SEARCH THROUGH THE CAVERN.

Nick Carter made his way as rapidly back through the cavern as he had gone through it with Patsy; but when he arrived at the entrance he came to a stop, and then went ahead again very slowly.

He had no idea how long a time he had been gone, nor what might have happened during his absence.

But when he peered out upon the valley everything was apparently in the condition in which he had left it. If there had been any change at all, it was only that fewer of the men were gathered around the fires. Otherwise everything was the same.

And so, with all the swiftness he could muster, he crawled to the cabin which Handsome had given him to occupy, entered it cautiously, and, finding it empty, crawled into the bunk that had been allotted to him—tired, but rejoiced to think that he had succeeded so well where there had been such small chance of success.

And it so happened that he had barely laid himself down and composed himself to wait for developments, when a great cry went up, which was immediately followed by other shouts and loud curses—and Nick knew that the escape of Patsy had been discovered, and that he had returned just in time to avoid the consequences.

Almost immediately following upon the utterance of the shouts, the door of the cabin flew open, and Handsome leaped inside, his eyes ablaze, and his whole form quivering with rage—and he carried a flash-light, which he threw at once into the detective's face; into the face of the man he supposed to be Bill Turner.

Nick could see that the instant the light fell upon him Handsome seemed greatly relieved; and then, before the outlaw could utter a word, Nick cried out in the voice of Bill Turner:

"What—what's all that row about, Handsome?" and he blinked his eyes as if he had just been awakened.

"It's lucky for you that you don't know what it's about!" was Handsome's rejoinder. "Get out of that, Turner, and come along with me."

"But what's the matter?" demanded Nick, sliding out of the bunk. "What has happened?"

"The fellow Pat has escaped—that's what!" was the reply.

"Sho! You don't say so! Well, well, well! When did he do it?"

"I haven't found out yet. Come along. I thought at first that maybe you had had a hand in it—but I see you did not."

"What! *Me?*"

Every hobo that belonged to the gang had gathered in the center of the place near where the mock trial had been held, and they were talking earnestly together. Cremation Mike, with one hand held at the back of his head, was the center of the group—or rather of the throng.

But Handsome burst unceremoniously through the crowd and confronted Mike, Nick following at his heels.

Black Madge forced her way through it at the same time from the opposite side.

"Now, Mike," said Handsome savagely. "Tell me how this happened."

"I don't know. All that I know is, I got a crack on the head from behind. When I woke up, the bar had been ripped off the door and the bird had flown. That's all I know."

"How long ago did it happen?"

"How do I know that? Nobody can tell how long he's been unconscious. But I'll bet my hat that it ain't ten minutes. I don't think it's three minutes. He can't be far away, and"—grinning—"he can't get away. He can't go through the pass because the guards are there; I posted them myself; and the only way in which he could hope to get out is through the cave, and I don't believe he could find his way through there. I know that I wouldn't try it myself. I'd rather stay here and be hung."

Madge interrupted the conversation here.

"Do you think that he got out of the cabin without aid?" she asked of Mike. "Do you believe that it was he who struck you, Mike?"

"I do, Madge. I'm sure of it."

"Then you weren't keeping good guard, that's all."

"Well, I never thought it was possible for him to get out of that cabin. It may be that I dozed. I didn't suppose I did, but——"

"But," said Madge icily, "the point is this: The boys shall not be disappointed in the hanging-bee they were to hold in the morning. It is up to you, Mike, to find the prisoner. If you don't find him in time, you shall hang in his place—that's all. I mean it."

Cremation Mike's face turned to the color of chalk, for he realized that she did, indeed, mean what she said. For a moment he stood there trembling, and then he seized a lantern which one of the men was holding, and cried out:

"Come along whoever will help me. I know that he can't have gone far. He ain't had time. I know it. Come along."

"Wait," said Handsome coolly; and he turned to Nick.

"Turner," he said, "I begin to think that it is fortunate that you came here when you did."

"I am sure of it," said Nick in reply.

"You know that cave from end to end, don't you?"

"I think I do."

"Then you shall act as guide."

"All right. I'm ready."

But this short conversation had called the attention of Madge to the supposed old man, whom she had for the moment forgotten, and now she turned savagely upon him.

"I believe that you are at the bottom of this," she said, her eyes blazing.

Before Nick could make any reply, Handsome broke in.

"That is nonsense, Madge," he said. "I know it. As soon as there was an alarm—as soon as Mike yelled out that the prisoner had escaped, I begged it for the cabin, and I found Turner just waking up from his sleep, like he had no hand in it. He couldn't."

"It's lucky for you," said Madge, still eying Nick sharply.

"Will you guide us through the cave, Turner?" demanded Handsome.

"Sure."

"Then come on."

"Hold on a minute," said Nick. "Don't you think it would be a good idea to send some of the men to guard the other entrances? If the prisoner hasn't had time to get through the cave yet, and if he should happen to find one of the ways out on the other side, he'd run right into the arms of whoever was on the watch."

"Good!" said Handsome. "We know of two outside entrances. How many do you know about?"

"Four," replied Nick. "Four, not counting the hole under the Dog's Nose. That may be an entrance, but one man can guard that."

"Where are those entrances?"

Coolly Nick described how they might be found, using the exact language that had been used by the old man in his description of them; and after a short delay four men were sent away to each of the entrances, on a run, with instructions to remain on guard before them until they should be relieved.

"Now," said Nick, when they had gone, "we know that the prisoner can't escape. We know it's only a matter of time when he'll be caught—therefore we needn't hurry. Don't you agree with me, Handsome? He can't get out of the cave at any of the entrances, without being captured or shot down, an', o' course, he can't come back this way without meetin' with the same fate. Ain't that right?"

"I guess it is," agreed Handsome.

"Ain't that right, Miss Madge?" asked Nick again, turning to her.

"It sounds entirely reasonable," she replied. "There has been only one mistake made from the start of this affair, and that is that Pat was not shot down when he first showed himself here. As it stands now, he has temporarily made his escape. I am satisfied now that he is a spy, and I commission each one of you to shoot him down without mercy, on sight. I shall go with you into the cave to search."

"Do you wish me to direct the search?" asked Nick, still standing quietly before her.

"Yes. What have you to suggest?"

"This: There be four entrances outside o' the one here in this little valley. I should divide the men into four parts. I kin direct each party so that it won't have no difficulty in followin' the cavern and searching it thoroughly to the entrance. I'll take one o' the parties. How many men are there here now?"

"Let me see," replied Madge. "Sixteen have gone away to guard the entrances, and four will have to remain here on guard. That takes away twenty. We still have eighty left."

"Good. That'll give us twenty in each party. Now, madam, it's for you to say which'll lead them. I'll see who the leaders will be, and I'll instruct 'em at once."

She picked out four of the men, and ordered them to step forward; and one by one Nick directed each of them how to proceed after he had passed the entrance of the cavern with the men who were to follow him; and he made the directions so explicit that there was not one who had any doubt about being able to follow them.

It was as Nick had suspected it would be; that Madge

did not yet trust him far enough to give him the sole leadership of one of the parties, but she directed that Handsome should go with him—and at the last moment, when they were ready to start, and after the other three parties had entered the cavern, she decided to accompany Nick's party herself.

"I may as well go along," she said. "I would like to learn something about the interior of that cavern myself, and I don't know a better way to learn it than to go with you."

And so it was that presently the detective found himself in the cavern, leading twenty-two persons, for the extra two were Madge and Handsome.

And the course that Nick had selected for himself was the one that would take him past the hiding-place where he had left Patsy; for it was no part of his plan that he should give the others even a chance of an accident of finding that hiding-place.

It had been shortly after eleven o'clock when Nick returned to the cabin after assisting Patsy in his escape: it was now after midnight.

There were torches and lanterns in abundance scattered among the four parties that were searching; and, in the directions that Nick had given each party, he had taken good care that they should become thoroughly lost if possible. He had an object in this, as will be seen.

The way through the cave along the route which the detective had selected to follow was smooth and even, as we already know; but Nick made it as long and as rough as possible by taking the party off into some of the side galleries as they proceeded.

He was looking for a place where he might lose some of them, and at least where he might, before the expedition was finished, succeed in separating them.

What he chiefly desired was to finally get either Madge or Handsome alone with him.

It was two hours later before they finally passed the boulder behind which was the entrance to the hiding-place where Patsy was concealed; but not one of the party so much as glanced toward it; and Nick led the way on past it to the exit—and that exit was not the hole under the Dog's Nose, but a larger one at some distance from it.

There they found the four men who had been sent before, and they reported that they had seen nothing; and instructing them to remain on guard, Nick led his party back into the cave again.

And then, after a few moments, he pretended suddenly to find that fifth entrance—the hole under the Dog's Nose—and there four other men were waiting—and they had seen not a thing to suggest the proximity of the prisoner who had escaped.

"Now," said Nick, "I think we'd better s'arch them side galleries more thoroughly. If you'll return with me to the entrance from the valley, we'll start over again, and go into and through every one o' 'em. We'll divide our party into smaller groups o' three and four, and in that way we kin cover all of them at the same time. What do you say?"

"All right," said Madge, still looking upon him with suspicion. "But Handsome and I will remain with you, Turner."

"That is what I hoped you'd do," replied Nick; but he spoke with a meaning which she did not understand.

CHAPTER X.

NICK CARTER'S CLEVEREST CAPTURE.

They followed the plan suggested by the detective.

That is, they returned to the entrance from the valley, and there Nick divided his followers into six parties, thus arranging that four of the parties should contain four searchers each, one of them should contain three, and his own immediate party should consist of himself, with Handsome and Madge.

To the leaders of each of these subparties he gave the necessary directions, with the result that he sent them off as they arrived at their respective galleries, and after a little he found himself alone with the two chiefs of the outlaws.

"There ain't much for us to do now," he said. "There ain't much more searching as we kin do. There's only two galleries left for us to explore 'less we find some hiding-place that's remained unknown until now."

"And that isn't likely, is it?" asked Madge. Her voice was still filled with suspicion against him.

"You know as much about that ere as I do," he replied.

But they searched each of the galleries without any result, and Nick finally directed the route so that at last they paused to rest directly in front of the movable rock behind which was the entrance to the place where Patsy was concealed.

And Nick seated himself so that his own back was against that rock, for he did not care to run the chance

that Handsome might lean against it hard enough to move it—at least, not until he was in every way prepared for that part of the drama.

Madge was tired by this time, and she showed it.

She leaned against the rocky wall and sighed deeply; and Handsome furnished the cue for the next scene—so perfectly that Nick could not have ordered it otherwise if he had tried.

"I'm dry," said Handsome, yawning. "This is dry work, Madge. Don't you think we had better give the thing up for a time and wait. Pat will be starved out after a little. He'll have to come out and get caught."

"If he ain't lost in the galleries," suggested Nick; and Madge replied:

"No; we won't give it up. If you are dry, Handsome, suppose you go to the camp and get something for us all. I wouldn't mind having something myself."

"I'll do it," said Handsome, rising. "Wait here."

He was off like a shot, for now he felt that he knew the route sufficiently well through the caverns to find his way without difficulty; as, indeed, he did. And he had a lantern to light his path.

Nick sat quietly until Handsome was well out of hearing, and then, purposely, he leaned very hard against the rock behind him—so hard that it moved, and he nearly fell upon his back inside the opening.

With a well-simulated cry of surprise he leaped to his feet and stood staring, and Madge did the same.

"A secret hidin'-place!" cried out the supposed old miner—and he pushed the rock farther in, thus making the opening even larger.

Then he stooped forward toward it.

"Hello in there!" he called lustily, for he wished to warn Patsy of what was taking place, and at the same time to instruct him what to do. "Come out of that, you —*Pat!* There are two of us here, and one is Madge herself. Come out of that!"

"You fool!" exclaimed Madge.

"Come out of that!" repeated the detective, pretending not to hear her. "Come out of that, or we'll come in after you!"

There was no reply, and Nick turned to her.

"Come along," he said. "We'll go inside and find him."

She had a revolver in her hand, and now she stepped quickly forward, for there was nothing of the coward about Black Madge. There was not a thing on earth that she feared.

She stepped forward so quickly that she had passed inside the barrier of rock before Nick—as he intended she should—and then, as he stepped after her, he seized her quickly from behind—seized both her arms and pulled them behind her with a suddenness that made her drop her weapon to the rocky floor.

As he pulled her backward, she tried to cry out, but he had anticipated that, and already he had grasped her so that he could press one of his hands for an instant over her mouth, and at the same moment he called out:

"Quick, Patsy! On your life! There isn't an instant to spare!"

And Patsy was ready and fully prepared.

He had approached them through the darkness at the first note of warning from Nick, and was in reality only a few feet distant when they entered the rocky passage; so that when the detective seized upon Madge and pulled her backward, Patsy was ready to leap forward and to give his aid.

When Nick's hand was pressed over her mouth to stop the cry that rose to her lips, Patsy was there to seize her, also; and he did it; and although she struggled fiercely, she was quickly overpowered, and a gag was thrust into her mouth.

Then they tied her, hand and foot, with cords with which Nick had provided himself, and together they carried her far back into the recess behind the rock.

"There is a big room here," said Patsy. "And it is stocked with provisions, and a stream of pure water trickles through it. One could live here a month without going out."

"Good!" said the detective. "Carry her in there. Then when we have made her safe, we will wait for Handsome, and serve him in the same manner. And after that, I have got a plan which will work the whole thing out to a finish."

Madge was glaring at him venomously all this time, for she could not speak. But her eyes were terrible to see in their utter ferocity.

She knew now what the game was that had been played against her. She knew now that the man she had supposed to be old Bill Turner was all the time no other than Nick Carter himself.

She could have bitten her tongue out with rage and chagrin. She fairly writhed in the ecstasy of her impotent anger.

But they laid her gently upon the rocky floor, where there were some blankets over leaves—it was evident that Bill Turner had used this place as a retreat of his own, and had provided it for that purpose, like a school-boy who finds a cave and makes a cache—and then Nick spoke to her.

"You see, Madge," he said, "it is all up with you and your gang; or very nearly so. We are going out now to capture Handsome, and bring him here to keep you company. After that I will show you a trick that will make you green with envy, and that will finish up this hobo business of yours once and forever. Come on, Patsy."

They left her there and returned to the entrance.

"Now," said the detective, "there is only one way to make Handsome fall into the trap. We must leave this entrance open for him to discover when he returns. He will first miss us. Then he will see the hole behind the rock. Then he will step forward to look inside. Then no doubt he will call out. I will stand here and remain silent; and then Handsome will do one of two things—he will either come inside to search for Madge and me, or he will set up a yell for the others to come to him."

"Suppose he brings some of the men back with him?" asked Patsy.

"We have got to chance that."

"Well, what are we to do when he steps inside this hole—for he will do that?"

"You stand over there in that niche," replied Nick. "When he steps inside the very nature of the place will bring his back toward me. I will tap him on the back of the head with my fist and knock him into your arms. You are to grab him with your arms around him, and hold him so that he cannot get at a weapon, and until I can get my fingers on him. That is all. Now, ready and wait."

They had some time to wait; longer than Nick expected, and he began to fear that Handsome would bring some of the men back with him; but at last they saw the glimmer of his light as he approached, and Nick knew by the sounds he heard that Handsome was returning alone.

Presently he appeared. He was calling out softly, for he could not understand why he had not been answered—and the light he carried prevented him from seeing the hole behind the rock until it was directly in front of him.

And then he came to a sudden stop and gaped at it in astonishment.

"*Gee!*" Nick heard him exclaim. "Dogged if they haven't found a hole here. And they have gone into it, too. I wonder if that old cuss knew about it all the time?"

He remained in doubt for a moment what to do; and then, as Nick had predicted, he stepped softly forward, and, holding his light aloft, peered through the opening.

But Nick had chosen his place of concealment well, and Handsome could not see him.

Then Handsome called out:

"Madge! Bill! Where the devil are you?"

There was no reply and he waited a moment before he called again. Then he repeated:

"Madge! *Madge!*"

When no reply came to this second call he stood for some time in doubt, as if he thought of calling assistance to him before he entered that dark and unknown place; and once Nick thought he half-turned, as if he had decided to summon some of the others.

But he evidently thought better of this, for he turned about resolutely again, and boldly stepped into the opening.

Two such steps brought him exactly into the position where the detective wanted him, and as soon as he had achieved it Nick struck him with his fist.

With a half-articulated cry, Handsome pitched forward and fell into the grasp of Patsy, who was ready for him; and then when he would have struggled, other arms—Nick's—seized him from behind, and another blow fell upon him, striking him behind the ear, and rendering him half-dazed for the moment.

And then Nick, knowing that Patsy could hold him, turned about and closed the rock door of the retreat; and before Handsome had recovered his senses sufficiently to offer any resistance the two detectives had bound him so securely that he could not move.

"Take his feet," ordered Nick, then. "We will carry him back into that chamber, to keep Madge company."

While they were doing that Handsome managed to recover his powers of speech—for, now that the rock door was closed, Nick did not think it necessary to gag the man—and his powers of speech in this particular instance were something frightful to listen to.

He was still swearing when they dropped him, some

too gently, upon the floor of the cavern not far from Madge; and then Patsy lighted two bracket-lamps with which the place was provided, while Nick smilingly removed the gag from Madge's mouth.

It is never pleasant to hear a woman swear; it is not pleasant even to refer to such a thing; but the truth requires that it should be noted here that Madge was quite as adept at the art as her first lieutenant.

Where Handsome had worn out his vocabulary of curses, Madge took it up and completed it in masterly style, and there was really nothing for either of the detectives to say for a long time.

But her breath was gone after a while, and she lapsed into sullen silence, closing her remarks with the request:

"At least give me something to drink out of that bottle that Handsome went after."

Nick could really do no less, and he complied; and the liquor seemed to restore some of her accustomed coolness, for she looked at Nick with an ugly gleam in her black eyes, and said:

"You are Nick Carter again, aren't you?"

"Again?" replied Nick, laughing. "I was always Nick Carter. I was so interested in that last interview I had with you, Madge, that I couldn't stay away; and now, when you condemned my assistant to death, you hastened the reckoning. That is all."

"I'll condemn you to death yet—and watch you die, too!" was her retort.

CHAPTER XI.

NICK CARTER GIVES BAD MEDICINE.

Handsome had also recovered from his paroxysm of rage by this time, for he was one who had the gift of knowing when he was beaten, and the logic to accept a situation when he knew that it could not be avoided.

"I reckon you've got the drop on us, Carter," he said. "You've played the game mighty well, too. There is one thing about it that I would like to know, though, if you will tell me. Will you?"

"What is it?" asked the detective.

"I want to know if you have been old Bill Turner from the beginning. I want to know if it was you whose acquaintance I made in the first place, the time I was pulled out of the hole in the rocks, or if it was old Bill himself."

"That was the old man himself," replied Nick, smiling.

"And the second time I met him; was that him—or you?"

"That was the old man, also."

"Well, all that I can say is that you have played the part so devilish well that I find it hard to believe even now that you are not what you appear to be."

"You're a fool!" said Madge spitefully.

"Oh, I admit the impeachment, Madge. There isn't any doubt of it. I'm a fool, all right."

"And you are up against it rather hard just now, Handsome; you and Madge," said Nick.

"I know that, too. I'm no fool as far as that is concerned. What are you going to do about the rest of the gang?"

"I'm going to capture the whole bunch," was Nick's rather astonishing reply.

"I don't see how you are going to do it," retorted Handsome. "There is a cold hundred of them all told—and every entrance to the cave is guarded. You attended to that yourself, I remember."

"Certainly, I did; because I foresaw this very moment."

"Well, all that I can say is that you can see a cussed sight farther into a stone fence than I can."

"I'll show you how it is done, if you are interested," replied the detective. "But first, I am afraid that I will have to ask you to step out here a moment, into the other part of the cave, always remembering that if you make any kind of a break, down you go with a cracked skull;" and Nick leaned forward and loosened the cords around his ankles.

"Oh, I know when my hands are in the air, Carter. If I make any breaks it will be because I think I see a chance of winning. What do you want?"

He rose stiffly to his feet as he asked the question; and Nick looked him in the eye as he replied:

"I want you to remember, in the first place, that I am more than twice or three times as strong as you are, and that if you offer to give me any trouble I shall hurt you; and hurt you so badly, too, that you won't get over it right away. I am going to take you into the other part of this cavern, toward the door where we entered. I am going to free your hands, and then I shall ask you to put on these old togs that Turner has left here for a change of clothing in case he got wet—for I want these that I am wearing for Patsy. After you have made the change I shall tie you up again, and then you will see—what you will see. But remember, if you refuse to obey me

on the instant that I give an order, down you go, and I will take the clothing off your senseless body, instead of letting you do it, and keep well. Now, are you ready?"

"Yes."

Nick took him into the adjoining part of the cave, and held the light on him while he made the necessary change; for Nick had found some extra clothing of Turner's in the cave; and when that was done he tied Handsome up again, more securely than ever, and placed him on the floor again.

"Now, Patsy," he said, "you and I will make a change. You will play the part of old Turner, and I will play the part of Handsome. It is necessary for what we have to do."

Nick first dressed himself in the outer clothes that Handsome had removed; and then he sent Patsy into the other part of the cave to put on the clothing he had taken off—the suit that he had worn as old Turner; and while Patsy was making the change he was himself busily engaged in removing the white beard and hair that he had been wearing.

It will not be necessary to describe in detail this operation; it is sufficient to say that the two detectives worked steadily for a long time; and that when at last they were through with what they were doing, Nick had assumed the personality of Handsome, and Patsy was transformed into what Nick had been—old Bill Turner.

When everything was in readiness, he saw to it once more that the bonds which held his two prisoners were sufficiently secure, and that there was no possibility of their escaping; and he went so far as to fasten them to the opposite walls, so that they could not crawl within reach of each other, and make use of their teeth; and then he turned to Patsy, who was now, to all outward appearance, old Bill Turner.

"Come along, Bill," he said, exactly imitating the voice of Handsome—so that Handsome grinned in spite of himself. "We have got a lot to do yet, and it will be daylight before we know it."

They passed outside then, into the corridor of the cavern, and when Nick had shut the big rock in place over the entrance, he wedged the small stone under it, so that it could not be moved from the inside.

"There," he said. "Even if they should get loose, which is not at all likely, they could not get out. And if they yell themselves hoarse, nobody could hear them. Come on. We've got a lot of work cut out for us."

"What is there to do first?" asked Patsy.

"The first thing is to return to the cabins in the valley, and find out what time it is. Oh, there is a watch in those clothes. Look at it. What time is it?"

"Half-past two," replied Patsy, imitating the broken voice of the old man to perfection.

"That's good, Patsy. I refer to your imitation. You will not have to use it much—possibly not at all; but it is as well to be perfect in your part all the same. I think we will have time enough for what we have to do if we hurry."

He led the way rapidly then, back to the valley, where some of the searchers had already returned, and he found them grouped around the exit, when they issued from the cave.

But when they attempted to address him, believing him to be Handsome, he returned no reply, for he had seen Handsome ignore them utterly many times; but it was Cremation Mike who stepped forward in front of them as they approached the cabin in which Madge was supposed to live.

"Any luck?" he demanded surlily.

"No," repied Nick, stopping for a moment.

"Look here, Handsome, if that fellow is gone for good, do you suppose that Madge will do what she said she would?"

"What was that, Mike?"

"Hang me in his place?"

"I shouldn't wonder if she did."

"Say, Handsome, can't you say a word for me with her? Where is she? Can I see her?"

"You had better keep away from her," suggested Nick.

"No; I want to see her. Take me to her, will you?"

"All right. Come along," replied the detective, and so Cremation Mike fell in behind them, and followed them into the cabin where Madge was supposed to be.

But they were no sooner inside the house with the door closed than Nick wheeled in his tracks, and grasped Mike by the throat, and then struck him with his fist over the temple. The result was that Cremation Mike sank to the floor without a sound, and was speedily bound and gagged.

"That's one," said the detective grimly. "There are a good many more, Patsy."

"Do you expect to get them all, one by one, in that way?" asked Patsy. "It will take a week to do that."

"No; I have a better plan than that. Wait."

Nick knew of Madge's fondness for trap-doors, and also that she always kept a large supply of liquors on hand with which sometimes she treated her men, or some of them.

And he remembered with great distinctness one time when she had succeeded in drugging him, so he had no doubt that somewhere in that cabin he would not only find the liquors he wanted, but also the drugs.

There was a trap-door in the floor of the largest room in the cabin, and under it was a shallow cellar wherein were several cases of liquors. The robbery of freight-cars had always kept the hoboes well supplied with such articles.

"Now, I'm going to make the hoboes a punch," he said to Patsy. He was searching through a cupboard while he spoke, and from there he produced a large bottle of laudanum. "I will have to use this," he continued. "It is the only thing here which will do at all, and as it has an excessively bitter taste, I will have to make a punch in order to conceal it. But it will do the work I want done better and more safely than anything else."

"You'll have to use a wash-tub for the punch, to make enough for all of them," said Patsy. "And is there enough laudanum?"

"Plenty; and there is a couple of pails. They will do as well as a tub. Now help me. We have lemons, and sugar, and everything that we require, here in this cupboard. But first, let's drop Cremation Mike into the cellar with the cases."

They did that, and replaced the trap-door; then they sliced lemons—all that they could find; they found a pot of cold tea, and this they dumped into the mess with the laudanum; and upon all this, bottle after bottle of the whisky was poured into the pails until they were filled to the brim.

"Now, Patsy," said the detective, "remember that you are old Bill Turner. I want you to go out among the men right now, and tell them that Madge and Handsome have fixed them all up a punch, and if they will form in line and pass in front of the door of this cabin, each one of them can have one drink of it. And it would be a good idea if you should act as if you had already taken your own two—or several. It will give them confidence."

"I can do it," replied Patsy, and he went out.

After a little Nick heard the murmur of voices before the cabin, and he stepped to the door and opened it, and there he found that the men, without an exception, were those who were on guard at different places—he found that eighty men had formed in line, and were ready for the treat that had been promised them.

He carried out the two pails and stood them on the porch; and then with a dipper in one hand and a goblet in the other, he called out:

"Come up slow, now; one by one. Don't be in haste. Remember there are two drinks each, for you, and no more. These two pails will just about do it. I'm doing the trick for Black Madge, who happens to be busy just now."

And so they began the procession past him; and so he doled out the concoction he had arranged for them, and watched them gulp it down with evident relish; and he called out when he served the first drink:

"The orders are that each one of you, as soon as you have had your two drinks, shall go to your quarters and turn in. You are wanted to rest up, so that we can begin this search again, and find that fellow we are after. Come on, now. When you have taken your medicine, go to your bunk-houses and turn in—all of you!"

And they came. Then they took their medicine, and so nicely had Nick calculated the quantity that would be required that there was scarcely a pint of the concoction left when they were through.

Many of them stopped long enough to beg for a third drink of it, and only once did Nick grant that request—to a big fellow for whom two might not be sufficient.

And within thirty minutes after that last one had passed the porch, that camp was as quiet as a church.

CHAPTER XII.

NICK CARTER'S GREATEST CAPTURE.

"Patsy," said the detective, when they reentered the cabin, after watching their punch consumed almost to the dregs, "this is about the biggest capture I was ever in!"

"But we are not through yet, chief," replied the assistant, stroking the white beard he wore so naturally that Nick laughed aloud. "There are sixteen more men at liberty yet, and we have got the whole bunch to tie up. Don't forget that there are four men stationed at each of the outside entrances to——"

"Oh, I haven't forgotten it. We will serve them in the same way. All we have to do is to manufacture one more pail of punch. Six bore holes. And as for tying them up, that will hardly be necessary."

"Why?"

"They are good for twelve hours of solid sleep at the very least. Many of them will not waken in twenty-four hours."

"And maybe some of them will never wake up. How is that?"

"It is a chance that we had to take; but by restricting them to two drinks each, I figured that there would be no danger. No; I think we are all right. Now, help me make this extra pail of punch. After that we will carry it through the cavern to the different parties of four each."

"Suppose they get suspicious, and won't drink it?"

"No danger of that, my lad."

When the punch was made, they divided it into two lots, each carrying half, and, thus equipped, they again entered the cavern, this time just as daylight was beginning to appear.

The first party they selected to serve was the one farthest away, and the detective discovered that they were grumbling because they had not been relieved.

But when he appeared with the pail of punch, and told them what had happened—that every one had been served with the same thing—they forgot their sorrows and had their share as the others had taken theirs.

And here, in order to make doubly sure, Nick had given each of the drinks a larger dose of the sleeping-draft than he had served in the valley. As soon as the men had drunk what was given them, and had been refused more, he left them, followed by Patsy, and returned through the cave to another entrance.

And here again the operation was repeated in the same manner, an idea of suspicion never once entering the head of any of the men; they were far too eager for the drink which the thoughtfulness of their mistress had provided for them.

"They'll be suspicious when they begin to feel drowsy all at once," suggested Patsy, as they moved away.

"Let them," replied Nick. "We won't be there, and not one of them will be able to go very far before he drops in a stupor. I have fixed it, all right."

They found the second party as eager as the first, and one of them already the worse for too many drinks from a bottle he had had in his pocket; but they took the medicine that Nick portioned out to them as the others had done, and they in turn were left alone to drop off to sleep as they would; for they had been awake all night, and now it was broad daylight. They figured that they deserved some sleep.

At the third entrance the four men were already alseep—all but one of them, and he was drowsing; and Nick, in his character of Handsome, pretended to be angry at first. He pretended to refuse to give them the punch that had been sent to them until they begged so hard that he finally relented.

"Why," said Patsy, when they left them, and took their way toward the fourth, and last, place—the hole under the Dog's Nose, near the place where Handsome and Madge were prisoners, "it's all as easy as living on a farm."

"And not half so interesting," laughed the detective.

They walked past the movable rock behind which the two prisoners were confined without so much as devoting a glance to it, for they were both intent upon accomplishing this last instalment of capture through the medium of the laudanum; and here they found the four men who were on duty, just about ready to mutiny because they had not been relieved.

But the preesnce of Handsome—or the man they believed to be Handsome—quieted them at once, for they stood in wholesome dread of him and his anger; and when they understood what had been brought to them, they were ready for anything.

And so it was that in their turns they took their medicine as the others had done.

When they had swallowed it, Nick said to them.

"Stretch out, now, you fellows, where you are. I'll let you sleep for a while, at least. I'm going to sit here and smoke. I am tired myself. Turner, sit down. We'll keep watch here for a spell."

The men did not require a second invitation, but speedily took advantage of the permission—and it was surprising how soon the laudanum took effect upon them.

Ten minutes had not elapsed before the four were sleeping soundly, and snoring as if they never expected to awake again.

"I think we can go now," said Nick, at last, rising.

"What is the next trick to be done?" asked Patsy.

"Let me see," replied Nick. "It's thirty miles from here to Calomont. How far is it to the railway-track, in a direct line? That is the way you came, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"How far is it?"

"About four miles, possibly. I can make it in an hour."

"Then skip. This is the nearest point to start from. Get to the track as soon as you can. Flag the first train that comes along, no matter what it is. Get aboard it, and go to the first station. Get off there, and use the telegraph-operator. Have him wire to Mr. Cobalt, the president of the road, exactly what has happened. Ask Cobalt to send a special train to us from the nearest point. We will want about twenty officers to take charge of all these prisoners, and he had better send along some chains with padlocks on them. You can figure that out yourself. We will want to make chain-gangs of these men, so that they can walk to the railway, but so that they are chained together and cannot escape. You've got the idea?"

"Yes."

"Go, then, and see how quickly you can get the officers here, and we can get this crew away from here."

"And you?"

"I'll stay here. Skip, now. Don't talk any more."

"Have I got to carry these whiskers with me?" grinned Patsy.

"You'd better not stop to remove them now. I put them on to stay. Go!"

And Patsy went.

Nick remained where he was for a while, thinking deeply, and altogether satisfied with what he had accomplished; but after a little he rose, and took his way back into the cave, intending to see what Handsome and Madge were doing, and if they were making any effort to free themselves.

But after he had reentered the cave, and had covered the twenty rods that intervened between it and the movable rock, he stopped in astonishment and stared.

The rock was pushed wide open.

With a bound he darted forward and entered the place, but only to find that Madge and Handsome had both disappeared. Their bonds were lying upon the floor of the cavern, but they were no longer there themselves.

Nick did not wait to see more than that then.

He turned away on a run, and darted through the galleries with all the speed he could summon under the circumstances—and he came out into the valley, where the sun was shining, directly behind his two escaped prisoners, for they had not preceded him by more than a minute, evidently.

With one wild spring he was upon them, and as Handsome turned to defend himself, Nick hit him with his fist, so that he sent him reeling across the grass, where he fell senseless to the earth.

But in the meantime Madge had turned with a scream of rage, and when she saw the real Handsome fall helpless, she broke into a run toward her own cottage, for she had no weapon to use now, Nick having deprived them both of their guns.

But the detective ran after her, and, just as she was about to leap upon the porch, he succeeded in seizing her, and in pulling her back again toward him.

She turned upon him then like a fury; but with a laugh he sprang under her extended arms, and seized her around the waist; and then he lifted her from her feet, and, still laughing, he ran across the grass to the cabin in which Patsy had once been a prisoner, and in another moment he had tossed her inside, closed the door and fastened it.

For a long time he could hear her storming in there, but he had to hurry back to Handsome, who was still down and out when he got to him, but who presently revived.

But he had had all the fight taken out of him, and he allowed himself to be bound again securely, after which Nick led him to Madge's cabin, and tied him to one of the rustic chairs on the porch.

And it was the taking of Black Madge's Hobo Gang that Nick Carter afterward regarded as his greatest capture; for, including Black Madge and her first lieutenant, Handsome, there were one hundred and two prisoners turned over to be dealt with by the law when Patsy returned to the place in the hills, having piloted the officers who were sent by special train to complete the capture.

Black Madge did not see the detective again to speak to him; but she sent him a note, in which she said:

"I haven't done with you yet, Nick Carter. I will never forgive you for fooling me as you did. I shall manage to get my liberty again, somehow, some time, and when I do, it will be for the purpose of wreaking vengeance on you. And I will get even some day, never fear."

THE END.

The next number (543) will contain "Black Madge's Vengeance; or, Nick Carter's Crafty Foe." Ready next week.

The Nick Carter Weekly

ISSUED EVERY SATURDAY. HANDSOMEST COLORED COVERS

No other detective library contains stories that are half so interesting. Nick Carter has been all over the world and has had experience with all kinds of criminals.

That's why, boys, his adventures holds one's interest from cover to cover. There is no brutality in Nick's make-up—he does not need it—he uses his wits. Do not fail to get the latest number from your newsdealer.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

518—A Dangerous Woman; or, Nick Carter Faces a Crisis.
519—Madge Morley's Ghost; or, Nick Carter's Desperate Fight.
520—An Automobile Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Bloodhound on the Scent.
521—The Mysterious Stranger; or, Nick Carter's Complex Case.
522—The White Arm of a Woman; or, Nick Carter's Desperate Chase.
523—The Man in the Doorway; or, Nick Carter's Conquest of a Castle.
524—The Plot of the Baron; or, Nick Carter's Telling Strategy.
525—The Passenger on the Night Local; or, Nick Carter's Perfect Disguise.
526—A Double Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Strong-hand Play.
527—Clarice, the Countess; or, Nick Carter's Motor-boat Chase.
528—Clarice, the Woman Detective; or, Nick Carter's Titled Assistant.
529—The Index of Seven Stars; or, Nick Carter Finds the Hidden City.
530—An Amazonian Queen; or, Nick Carter Becomes a Gladiator.
531—A Blackmailer's Paradise; or, Nick Carter Discovers the Hidden Hand.
532—Gipsy Madge, the Blackmailer; or, Nick Carter's First-class Bluff.
533—Facing an Unseen Terror; or, Nick Carter's Day of Blunders.
534—Idayah, the Woman of Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Fourfold Problem.
535—The Making of a King; or, Nick Carter Faces His Greatest Mystery.
536—The Empire of a Goddess; or, Nick Carter's Wonderful Adventure.
537—Zanabayah, the Terrible; or, Nick Carter's Struggle With the Vitic King.
538—The Seven-headed Monster; or, Nick Carter's Midnight Caller.
539—The Woman of the Mask; or, Nick Carter's Quadruple Mystery.
540—The Masked Woman's Daring Plot; or, Nick Carter Springs a Surprise.
541—Hobo Harry, the Beggar King; or, Nick Carter Downs the Yeggman.
542—Black Madge's Hobo Gang; or, Nick Carter and the Yeggman Queen.
543—Black Madge's Vengeance; or, Nick Carter's Crafty Foe.
544—A Tragedy of the Footlights; or, Nick Carter and the Temple of Vice.
545—The Maynard Woman's Double; or, Patsy's Terrific Brain Storm.
546—Three Against Fifteen; or, Patsy's Splendid Courage.
547—A Mystery of Two Passengers; or, Nick Carter Prevents a Great Crime.

If you want any back numbers of our libraries and cannot procure them from your newsdealers, they can be obtained from this office direct. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.

A GOLD MINE FOR OUR BOYS!

Second Grand Letter Competition

WE received so many hundreds of really excellent letters from readers of the **Rough Rider Weekly** in response to our first offer of gold dollars, that the Committee awarding the twenty leading prizes had considerable difficulty in carrying out their work; which, however, was finally done, the names printed, and the rewards sent forward. From time to time we shall print in our Chat Columns all these letters entering into the competition. And we also hope that every one who participated in the first contest will decide to take advantage of our second great offer. Tell us what, in your mind, a cracking good story of

RANCH AND RANGE LIFE

should be, and whether these stories by Mr. Ned Taylor fill the bill. We believe they stand in a class by themselves; and from many a Western cattle State we daily receive letters full of praise and enthusiasm for the work of

OUR COWBOY AUTHOR

which letters are written by those entirely familiar with life on the prairie ranches, and who would laugh to scorn stories by an author whom they knew never could have ridden a bucking bronco. Make up your mind to try for these golden prizes right away. Even if you fail to secure one of the twenty leading prizes, we expect to send a splendid consolation offering to every one who competes. Let us know in what way these tales of the Wild West appeal to you, and what you have done to influence your boy pards to read them regularly.

¶ The competition is open from April 1 until October 1, 1907, when the prizes will be awarded, full name and address of every winner being published in the **Rough Rider Weekly.**

HERE ARE THE PRIZES

$10 in Gold for the Best Letter.
$5 in Gold for Each of the Three Next Best Letters.
$2.50 in Gold for Each of the Six Next Best Letters.
$1 in Gold for Each of the Ten Next Best Letters.

¶ The letters should not be longer than 250 words and should be plainly addressed to "Manager of Rough Rider Letter Competition," care of Street & Smith. Now, boys, jump in and resolve to win a cash prize.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK

BUFFALO BILL STORIES

ISSUED EVERY TUESDAY. **BEAUTIFUL COLORED COVERS**

Buffalo Bill wins his way into the heart of every one who reads these strong stories of stirring adventure on the wide prairies of the West.

Boys, if you want tales of the West that are drawn true to life, do not pass these by.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

288—Buffalo Bill's Dance of Death; or, The Night Hawks of Snake River.
289—Buffalo Bill and the Creeping Terror; or, The Black Spider of the Shoshones.
290—Buffalo Bill and the Brand of Cain; or, The Wandering Jew of the Plains.
291—Buffalo Bill and the Mad Millionaire; or, The Redskin Rovers.
292—Buffalo Bill's Medicine-lodge; or, The White Queen of the Kickapoos.
293—Buffalo Bill in Peril; or, The Red Amazons of the Niobrarah.
294—Buffalo Bill's Strange Pard; or, Wolfer Joe on the War-path.
295—Buffalo Bill in the Death Desert; or, The Worship of the Phantom Flower.
296—Buffalo Bill in No Man's Land; or, The Sky-mirror of the Panhandle.
297—Buffalo Bill's Border Ruffians; or, The Desperate Game of Panther Pete.
298—Buffalo Bill's Black Eagles; or, The Snake-master from Timbuctoo.
299—Buffalo Bill's Desperate Dozen; or, The Raiders of Round-Robin Ranch.
300—Buffalo Bill's Rival; or, The Scalp-hunter of the Niobrarah.
301—Buffalo Bill's Ice Chase; or, The Trail of the Black Rifle.
302—Buffalo Bill and the Boy Bugler; or, The White Flower of Fetterman Prairie.
303—Buffalo Bill and the White Specter; or, The Mysterious Medicine-man of Spirit Lake.
304—Buffalo Bill's Death Defiance; or, The Bad Men of Timber Bar.
305—Buffalo Bill and the Barge Bandits; or, The Demon of Wolf River Cañon.
306—Buffalo Bill, the Desert Hotspur; or, Pizen Jane, of Cinnabar.
307—Buffalo Bill's Wild Range Riders; or, The Vengeance of Crazy Snake.
308—Buffalo Bill's Whirlwind Chase; or, The Mustang Catchers of Bitter Water.
309—Buffalo Bill's Red Retribution; or, The Raid of the Dancing Dervishes.
310—Buffalo Bill Haunted; or, The White Witch of the Niobrara.
311—Buffalo Bill's Fight for Life; or, Caught in the Cave of Lions.
312—Buffalo Bill's Death Jump; or, The Ogallalas' Last Stand.
313—Buffalo Bill and the Pit of Horror; or, The White Queen of Paradise Valley.
314—Buffalo Bill in the Jaws of Death; or, The Strange Sacrifice of Uncapah.
315—Buffalo Bill's Aztec Runners; or, The Hate of the Gilded Mexican.
316—Buffalo Bill's Dance with Death; or, Peril on the Golconda Gold Trail.
317—Buffalo Bill's Redskin Rovers; or, Old Nick Nomad's Wolf Trick.
318—Buffalo Bill's Fiery Eye; or, Red Thunderbolt's Last Battle.
319—Buffalo Bill's Mazeppa Ride; or, The Robber League of the Panhandle.

If you want any back numbers of our libraries and cannot procure them from your newsdealers, they can be obtained from this office direct. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.

How the Early Numbers of the TIP TOP WEEKLY May Be Secured

TO the boys who take interest in the adventures of Frank Merriwell and want to read everything that was written about him, we desire to say that numbers 1 to 325 of the **Tip Top Weekly** containing his early adventures are entirely out of stock and will not be reprinted. These numbers, however, were published in the Medal Library beginning with No. 150 which is entitled "Frank Merriwell's School-days." We give herewith a complete list of all the Merriwell stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing.

We will send a complete catalogue of the Medal Library, which is just full of good things for boys, on receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

MEDAL LIBRARY AT 10c.

150—Frank Merriwell's Schooldays.
167—Frank Merriwell's Chums.
178—Frank Merriwell's Foes.
184—Frank Merriwell's Trip West.
189—Frank Merriwell Down South.
193—Frank Merriwell's Bravery.
197—Frank Merriwell's Hunting Tour.
201—Frank Merriwell in Europe.
205—Frank Merriwell at Yale.
209—Frank Merriwell's Sports Afield.
213—Frank Merriwell's Races.
217—Frank Merriwell's Bicycle Tour.
225—Frank Merriwell's Courage.
229—Frank Merriwell's Daring.
233—Frank Merriwell's Athletes.
237—Frank Merriwell's Skill.
240—Frank Merriwell's Champions.
244—Frank Merriwell's Return to Yale.
247—Frank Merriwell's Secret.
251—Frank Merriwell's Danger.
254—Frank Merriwell's Loyalty.
258—Frank Merriwell in Camp.
262—Frank Merriwell's Vacation.
267—Frank Merriwell's Cruise.
271—Frank Merriwell's Chase.
276—Frank Merriwell in Maine.
280—Frank Merriwell's Struggle.
284—Frank Merriwell's First Job.
288—Frank Merriwell's Opportunity.
292—Frank Merriwell's Hard Luck.
296—Frank Merriwell's Protégé.
300—Frank Merriwell on the Road.
304—Frank Merriwell's Own Company.
308—Frank Merriwell's Fame.
312—Frank Merriwell's College Chums.
316—Frank Merriwell's Problem.
320—Frank Merriwell's Fortune.
324—Frank Merriwell's New Comedian.

MEDAL LIBRARY AT 10c.

328—Frank Merriwell's Prosperity.
332—Frank Merriwell's Stage Hit.
336—Frank Merriwell's Great Scheme.
340—Frank Merriwell in England.
344—Frank Merriwell on the Boulevards.
348—Frank Merriwell's Duel.
352—Frank Merriwell's Double Shot.
356—Frank Merriwell's Baseball Victories.
359—Frank Merriwell's Confidence.
362—Frank Merriwell's Auto.
365—Frank Merriwell's Fun.
368—Frank Merriwell's Generosity.
371—Frank Merriwell's Tricks.
374—Frank Merriwell's Temptation.
377—Frank Merriwell on Top.

NEW MEDAL LIBRARY AT 15c.
INCREASED SIZE

380—Frank Merriwell's Luck.
383—Frank Merriwell's Mascot.
386—Frank Merriwell's Reward.
389—Frank Merriwell's Phantom.
392—Frank Merriwell's Faith.
395—Frank Merriwell's Victories.
398—Frank Merriwell's Iron Nerve.
401—Frank Merriwell in Kentucky.
404—Frank Merriwell's Power.
407—Frank Merriwell's Shrewdness.
410—Frank Merriwell's Set-back.

Published About May 27th

413—Frank Merriwell's Search.

Published About June 17th

416—Frank Merriwell's Club.

Published About July 8th

419—Frank Merriwell's Trust.

Published About July 29th

422—Frank Merriwell's False Friend.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, - NEW YORK CITY

THE FAVORITE LIST
OF FIVE-CENT LIBRARIES

Nick Carter Weekly

We know, boys, that there is no need of introducing to you Nicholas Carter, the greatest detective that ever lived. Every number containing the adventures of Nick Carter has a peculiar, but delightful power of fascination.

ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

Ted Strong was appointed deputy marshal by accident, but he resolves to use his authority and rid his ranch of some very tough bullies. He does it in such a slick way that everyone calls him "King of the Wild West" and he certainly deserves his title. $100 in cash are given to the readers of this publication,

Buy a copy and learn how to come in for a share of it.

BRAVE AND BOLD

Every boy who prefers variety in his reading matter, ought to be a reader of Brave and Bold. All these were written by authors who are past masters in the art of telling boys' stories. Every tale is complete in itself.

MIGHT AND MAIN

These are stories of the adventures of boys who succeeded in climbing the ladder of fame by honest effort. No more interesting tales can be imagined. Each number is at least one-third longer than the ordinary five-cent library.

DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY

The demand for stirring stories of Western adventure is admirably filled by this library. Every up-to-date boy ought to read just how law and order are established and maintained on our Western plains by Diamond Dick, Bertie, and Handsome Harry.

BUFFALO BILL STORIES

Buffalo Bill is the hero of a thousand exciting adventures among the Redskins. These are given to our boys only in the Buffalo Bill Stories. They are bound to interest and please you.

BOWERY BOY LIBRARY

The adventures of a poor waif whose only name is "Bowery Billy." Billy is the true product of the streets of New York. No boy can read the tales of his trials without imbibing some of that resource and courage that makes the character of this homeless boy stand out so prominently.

The Tip Top Weekly

Frank Merriwell and his brother Dick are known and loved by over one hundred and fifty thousand of the best boys in the United States. They are both clean-cut, vigorous fellows who dare to do right no matter what the consequences. Get the current number. We are sure you will like it.